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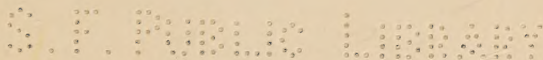
HENRI JULES DE BOURBON,
PRINCE DE CONDÉ.

RIVAL FRENCH COURTS

THE EXPERIENCES OF A LADY-IN-WAITING
AT SCEAUX, AT VERSAILLES, AND
IN THE BASTILLE

BY S. H. LOMBARDINI

WITH PORTRAITS



LONDON
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INTRODUCTION

THE heroine of the following pages was without wealth, without position, without influence, at least as these are counted in the circles in which she moved ; she could not bestow great favours upon her friends, nor awaken even small fears in the heart of her enemies. Yet her Memoirs, when they appeared a few years after her death, were greeted with an eagerness, read with a glow of interest which few writings have called forth.

Madame de Sévigné, the Duc de Saint-Simon, whose eyes had seen more and that more clearly than is given to most mortals to see, were never read, as authors, by their contemporaries. Nearly forty years elapsed after Madame de Sévigné's death before her letters, Memoirs in matter if not in form, were published and circulated ; more than a hundred years had heaped their dust upon Saint-Simon's ruthless portraits before they were revealed to the public ; but scarcely three years had passed after Madame de Staal's death, before Paris began to turn over eagerly the

leaves of her newly published *Memoirs*. They were in all hands, her name was on all lips. . . .

“Yes, all the women think so, but all the men do not . . .” said Troublet, sweeping all Paris into his answer to an ill-natured remark upon the topic of the hour. The remark had come from Fontenelle; he was then close upon his hundredth year, and his soul had dried within him. “I am sorry for her,” he had said of Madame de Staal, whom he had counted among his friends, “this is written with agreeable elegance, but it was not worth writing at all.”

Posterity has not sided with Fontenelle; over and over again, from women whom time and distance have rendered impartial, as well as from men endowed by heaven with natural fairness, we hear these spontaneous expressions of delight which a truly human document cannot fail to call forth. Madame de Staal has a sense of humour deliciously companionable, a charming directness most unique in that time of meandering periphrases, a philosophy so true and so discerning that it holds and fascinates.

“It seems to me,” says Sainte-Beuve, “that the *Memoirs* of Madame de Staal should be re-read at the beginning of each winter, at the end of autumn, beneath the November trees to the sound of the falling foliage.”

Yes, a certain note of sadness runs all through these Memoirs, and yet they read like a fairy tale—but a fairy tale with a human ending: joy declines through its pages, as it declines through the human years, as the sun declines through the autumn to the winter. There is a sudden turn of the wheel of fate, and instead of “living happily ever after” the heroine meets unhappiness face to face, and hears its footsteps dogging her own for ever on the unexpected path into which she has been forced.

Her childhood and her youth had been encompassed with joy and love and adulation; like a veritable little queen she had seen all who approached her acknowledge her sway, forestall her desires, extoll her decisions, and she had taken it as a matter of course. Her grace, her wit, her wisdom had been to her like so many magic wands—then the unexpected happens, and the young queen wakes up one morning to find herself a waiting maid! How does she bear herself under such crushing conditions; how does she draw from her very servitude the elements of the triumph which she is to accomplish, the greatest triumph, immortality in the minds of men? that question stimulates for ever the imagination, as one turns over the pages of Madame de Staal’s Memoirs.

It is true she lived at a time peculiarly charged with dramatic possibilities; the last years of

Louis XIV.'s reign, the first years which followed his death were perhaps more fraught with passion than any other time in French history. The fortress of absolutism and of tradition was crumbling down, the walls had fallen, and there lay revealed to eager and passionate eyes avenues endless and unexplored. But fate had enclosed Madame de Staal Delaunay within a magic circle in which all eyes were resolutely closed to realities. While the rest of France was coming fast into its natural inheritance; a sane desire to test the efficacy of thought by the efficacy of deeds, the little court of Sceaux, where Madame de Staal lived, persisted in treating thought as a futile plaything, and jangled words as a court jester jangles his bells, for the mere pleasure of hearing them tinkle. Madame du Maine, "queen of Sceaux" as she liked to hear herself called, masqueraded through life, a be-ribboned shepherdess, a nymph, a goddess, as fancy prompted, and forced into her masquerade all those who came into contact with her. She also dragged them with her into a conspiracy, which has its place in history, yet savours more of a comedy than of a political undertaking, dragged them incidentally into prison, and having herself emerged from a "cruel" captivity without having learned anything therefrom about the realities of life, she went back unchanged to her absurdities.

For fully twenty-five years longer she afforded the France of Voltaire and of the Encyclopædists the astonishing spectacle of a topsy-turvydom, where all played at being something which they were not, and strove night and day to outdo one another in futilities. Madame du Maine did it from choice, and her courtiers were hypnotised into it with or without their consent. As a representative of the "divine" right of the greater to impose their whims upon the smaller, Madame du Maine is indeed unsurpassed.

"If you wish," says Sainte-Beuve, "to study in a perfect specimen, and as if under the microscope, the dainty egotism the fantastic and coquettish despotism of a princess of the blood in the olden time, and the artless impossibility in which she lived of conceiving any other existence in the world than her own, go to Sceaux, there you will see these gross defects in miniature, just as we see gold-fish moving in the sunshine in a transparent bowl."

It is that "transparent bowl" which Madame de Staal Delaunay holds up to our eyes, and upon it she brings to play most skilfully the light of her humorous wisdom and philosophy. She lived in the atmosphere of Sceaux, yet was not of it; though she breathed it day after day, its narcotic properties could not dull her

clear vision nor drug her independent spirit. She is that rare exception among exceptions: an insider capable of taking an outsider's point of view. She has been much read, much discussed — the details of her life not mentioned in her Memoirs have been supplied by enthusiastic biographers. One rather unaccountable error seems to have slipped into most of these biographies; started by one, repeated by the others, it gave rise to a good deal of controversy: the date of Mademoiselle Delaunay's birth has been stated over and over again as 1693, and according to that she would have been barely eighteen when she entered Madame du Maine's service—What! said sceptic readers, a girl of eighteen, inexperienced, impressionable, delicately nurtured is suddenly called to fight life at most cruel odds and bears no apparent marks of its blows! The "indelible mark of the waiting-maid," as she herself calls it, is stamped so early upon her character, yet her dignity rises above it as a tall lily rises undefiled above the swamp in which it is rooted—impossible! there is some falsification!—womanlike, Madame de Staal Delaunay has tampered with her dates! Upon closer inspection one realises, however, that there has been no voluntary error of date in the Memoirs. Mademoiselle Delaunay does not state with any precision the year of her birth; moreover the

fact that certain historical events are mentioned by her as contemporary with certain circumstances of her life might have prevented the initial error. It is now commonly thought that Mademoiselle Delaunay was not in her nineteenth but close upon her twenty-sixth year when she entered Madame du Maine's service. She was ready to unravel the bewildering complexity of elements which were to make up her life at Sceaux, and although the sum total of it all was to be sadness, it was also to be fullness and richness of experience. It was given to her to taste of the bitterness and of the joy of life, of its futility and of its fervour; to her was given, moreover, that gift of expression which is the true liberator of the soul.

"She saw true," says Sainte-Beuve, in the charming chapter which he devotes to her, "and it was given to her to transmit to us what she saw. If she missed more than one gift of fate, she at least had those of mind, language, and taste. Some of her least sayings have come into the circulation of society and have added to the riches of the mind of France. More than that—by her noble conduct during a miserable conspiracy, she has won a place in all future history. How many statesmen who think themselves great men and who are striving all their lives, do not obtain as much!"

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RIVAL FRENCH COURTS

CHAPTER I

AT THE CONVENT OF SAINT-SAUVEUR

IN the year 1684 an obscure French artist named Cordier Delaunay emigrated to England, in the hope of finding there the sustenance, if not the fame, which his work had not brought him in France. His efforts did not meet with success; he was never able to send for the young wife whom he had left behind him in Paris, but in that same year, 1684, his name was rescued from oblivion through the birth of his second daughter, the future Madame de Staal Delaunay. Her charming Memoirs, in which that most modern element, the power not to take one's self too seriously, mixes so naturally with eighteenth - century sensibility, are among the most refreshing documents of a century famous for picturesque contrasts.

The first years of little Mademoiselle Delaunay were spent at the convent of Saint - Sauveur d'Evreux in Normandy, where, through the

introduction of some influential friends, her mother had been admitted as a non-paying *dame pensionnaire*. The abbess, Madame de la Rochefoucauld, was a sister of the famous Duc de la Rochefoucauld, author of the pessimistic "Maximes," and the fact that the abbess was an exclusive lover of dogs may be taken as an indication that she shared in some measure her brother's misanthropy. She had made of her apartment a home for homeless dogs. The lame, the blind, the weak, the aged filled it with whinings and with barkings, and with deep canine sighs of contentment and resignation; the place was theirs, and human invaders were warned to tread cautiously, for fear of infringing upon superior rights.

The child, who had found a shelter in the convent too, had lived there two years with her mother, and was four years old before her baby helplessness had been allowed to come into collision with lame paws and battered tails. In consequence the abbess hardly knew her, at a time when the other *religieuses* were already her devoted slaves. It happened then that one day she was asked with her mother to dine in Madame de la Rochefoucauld's apartment.

Very carefully, with serious baby intensity, she steered through the dangers against which she had been warned, when lo! there was a loud howl, and

the abbess' face assumed an expression of awe-inspiring sternness. The little girl stopped short, very much frightened, and some one whispered in her ear "Il faut demander pardon." With childish equity, the offender walked straight to the offended—dog though he was—and asked his pardon in regretful, well-chosen language. Everybody laughed; she was already famous all through the convent for her wonderful choice of words, this little four-year old pleader, but the abbess had never noticed it before; this time she loved her for it and remained her friend from that day onward.

The child had need of friends indeed. Very soon her mother had to leave her, in order to accept the post of governess to the Duchesse de Ventadour's daughter, and shortly after Monsieur Cordier Delaunay died in England. His little daughter had never seen him, and her later comment on her childish grief at the news of his death does not sound emotional. "Je ne me souviens plus d'où mes larmes partirent," she says in her Memoirs.

Madame de la Rochefoucauld proved a very good friend to the little orphan; but better friends still were two ladies then staying at the convent, Mesdames de Grieu, whose affection seemed to have amounted to extravagant devotion. "They were unoccupied," as Madame de Staal Delaunay explains in her Memoirs, analysing the situation

with her customary balance, "and loved me with the vehemence which solitude and listlessness are apt to give to all feelings." Madame de Grieu, former abbess of Saint-Jouarre, and her sister were awaiting in the convent of Saint Sauveur the issue of the quarrel between Louis XIV. and the Holy See, concerning the right of nominating abbesses for the "Urbanist" convents. The quarrel lasted long, and when at last, after five years, Madame de Grieu took possession of the convent of Saint Louis in Rouen, she adopted the child who had filled with interest the empty days of her interregnum.

At Saint Louis, little Mademoiselle Delaunay held absolute sway: she lived in the abbess' private apartments; four nuns, and with them Madame de Grieu's unwilling nieces, were bidden to wait upon her, and a pension which the abbess derived from private sources was spent almost exclusively on the child's education, entrusted to numerous and expensive tutors. As they passed in and out of the convent gates, these masters, who were part of the luxury lavished upon the abbess' *protégée*, were no doubt followed by many a disapproving glance and gesture of the good nuns; but they must have been immensely gratified with their pupil, who, at the age of thirteen, studied "passionately" the philosophy of Descartes and "amused" herself by anticipating his deductions, in order to

ascertain whether she had rightly grasped his meaning !

She soon had an opportunity of putting her dialectical talents to a practical use, and that in the defence of Madame de Grieu's interests against those of a rival abbess, nominated to Saint Louis by the Archbishop of Rouen. Madame de Grieu was then in a very difficult position : the murmurs of the gossiping nuns had swelled to the proportions of a rebellion, and the abbess was accused of spending the revenues of the convent on her nieces and her adopted daughter.

There were no grounds for this accusation ; the convent of Saint Louis was wretchedly poor, and even the wisest of administrations had failed to raise it to a state of prosperity, but not one sou of its revenues had been put to private or illegal use. Unable to prove her integrity, but determined to stand her ground, the abbess at last proposed to give up the temporal administration of the convent and the living which she herself derived from it, undertaking to depend entirely on her private income.

Many negotiations were necessary to arrive at a satisfactory agreement, and when this was reached at last, the legal advisers of the abbess were obliged to own that the most conclusive arguments in the case had come from the pen of a girl of fourteen—little Mademoiselle Delaunay. Her talents had,

by this time, won her more than mere technical admiration. The Memoirs mention among others a certain Monsieur Brunel who besieged her with love sonnets, which, however, seem to have made very little impression upon the recipient, and which certainly remained unanswered. In spite of rebuffs, and driven by an infatuation which thirsted to communicate itself, Brunel introduced to her a friend who speedily became a rival. It was a certain Abbé de Vertot, an impecunious and enthusiastic bookworm, the terror of all booksellers, whose books he thumbed rapturously from morning till night, without ever being able to buy them. The books now profited by his being in love; but not so the booksellers, for their ears rang with the praises of Mademoiselle Delaunay's genius and charms, while the books lay unheeded on the counter. It may have been during one of these rhapsodical but one-sided conversations that the famous Monsieur de Fontenelle, staying at Rouen for a few days, pushed open the door of the bookshop, and, after listening for a while in his usual deliberate manner, decided that Madame de Grieu's young *protégée* must be worth knowing. At any rate his voice joins the chorus of her praises about that time, and no weightier admiration could have been won than that of the fêted author of "La Pluralité des Mondes." Mademoiselle Delaunay does not, however, seem to have attached

much importance to the tribute of his appreciation ; she was then very interested in some friends who lived near the convent gates, and to whom she paid daily visits, very interested also in a relative of theirs, a Monsieur de Rey, who, after each visit, never failed to offer her his hand to escort her back to Saint Louis. The length and breadth of a public square lay between the house in question and the convent gates, and as Monsieur de Rey and Mademoiselle Delaunay sauntered through it observant onlookers might have noticed that at first they skirted the outer edge of the square, lengthening the road to the utmost. As the days went by, however, the couple steered more and more towards the diagonal crossing line, until at last the convent gates were reached with astonishing alacrity. “Calculate the quantitative difference between a ‘square’ and a ‘diagonal’ affection”—Mademoiselle Delaunay set herself that problem which she had helped to illustrate, and shed no tears over its solution !

CHAPTER II

THE MARQUIS DE SILLY

A CONVENT, in spite of its liberal attitude of two hundred years ago, would hardly seem the best possible school wherein to gain a knowledge of love, but Mademoiselle Delaunay's natural understanding of its laws and vagaries developed quite independently of her surroundings.

Of the vague stirrings of her young imagination before she meets the man whom she will love passionately to the end, she tells in a charming tone of amused detachment; and here and there, shining like little crystal drops of wisdom, are reflections which, collected and classified, would make an excellent "guide to love." "The heart hardly ever fails to rebel against any demands which it could not reciprocate" is her summing up of the hesitations and rejections awakened in her by the courtship of Monsieur Brunel. He was, as she describes him

"a man of exquisite discernment, possessed of much knowledge, yet lacking in those graces

which are only acquired in society, and which please more readily than do more sterling advantages. It interested me," she owns a little later on, "to unravel his real thoughts and feelings about me, but if he expressed them too clearly and seemed to expect some return, I felt a great distaste for him."

The first time she met a man of really polished manners, the social instinct in her leapt up and exulted, and she imagined that her heart was touched. It happened in an old Normandy château, very lonely and dull, where she was visiting a young convent friend.

"I had only met there a few country squires," she says, "who had not at all attracted my attention, when the chevalier d'Herb . . . came to call. He was asked to join in a game of cards, after which he went away, promising to return for a longer visit a little later."

Meanwhile Mademoiselle Delaunay made a discovery which seemed rather perturbing to her.

"I discovered," she continues, "that I desired his return; I thought over the reasons which I could have for that and finally explained to myself that he was a witty man, a man with social cleverness whose company one must naturally desire in a place as lonely as this was. Then, on examining more closely upon what I had based my opinion of his wit, and on trying to remember what I had heard him say, the only words of his which I could

recall were 'gano, trois matadors' — and 'sans prendre.'"

After that she was perhaps not quite unprepared for the disillusion which was to follow, and she closes the episode by remarking quite cheerfully: "When he came back and spoke at greater length, the wit with which I had endowed him so gratuitously vanished entirely."

It was at that same château, the Château de Silly in Normandy, that she met the man who was to colour and control the whole of her emotional life. The young Marquis de Silly was not at the château when Mademoiselle Delaunay first stayed there as the guest of his sister, but he was rarely absent from their conversations. His extreme selfishness had in fact a rare power of creating in others a total absorption in his interests; but of this the ardent young girl, ready for worship and seeking it, could know nothing yet. Besides, recent circumstances had contributed to lend still more interest to his personality. He was a soldier; he had fought bravely, had been taken prisoner at the battle of Hochstädt¹ and sent to England. There he had remained for some time, but,

"owing to the climate of that country," as Mademoiselle Delaunay reports, "he had been threatened with consumption, and had obtained

¹ Better known as the battle of Blenheim, 13th August 1704.

leave to return to France on his parole; the Paris doctors had advised him to go to Normandy to breathe his native air. Monsieur de Silly had spent his life in the best society and on a very agreeable footing. I had heard so much about him that I was very impatient to make his acquaintance."

However, Mademoiselle Delaunay had to wait till the return of the summer, for Monsieur de Silly could not be expected to endure the dullness of a winter in the country! The wished-for day arrived at last, and she went back to Silly full of anticipations.

"The son of the house was expected," she writes, "and all were already full of him. He arrived; everybody went to meet him. I went like every one else, but with a little less precipitation, and when I arrived upon the scene, he was already going up the stairs to his apartments. He turned round to give some orders. I was struck by the charm of his expression, and by a certain nobility in his bearing which made him look different from any one I had seen before."

From that ineffaceable moment her love for Monsieur de Silly was to remain the strongest element in her life, and his indifference was but to strengthen her passion.

"He did not invite conversation from any one," she adds, "and sought little intercourse at

first. Some books which he had brought with him afforded him companionship, and except at meals, he was rarely seen. But although he seldom took the trouble to speak, he spoke so well and with so much grace that his wit shone in spite of himself."

After this note of infatuation we are glad to find some natural feeling of pique.

"His charms and his disdain stung me to the quick, and his sister who had seen him more sociable was hardly less hurt by it than I was; this formed the constant subject of our conversations. . . ."

And then we hear that one fine day this very disdainful young hero, wandering through a wood, happened to overhear his name and deigned to stop and listen. Behind a hawthorn bush two young girls were hotly discussing a subject of paramount importance to himself—his own personality. He listened to all they said—this time his interest was fettered; and then he stole back quietly to the house, awaited their return, and told them that he had overheard a conversation, that it had been about himself—"qu'on en avait dit beaucoup de mal, et que ce n'était pas en riant. On n'a pas envie de rire, lui dis-je, quand on se plaint de vous. . . ." O charming mixture of flattery and bold sincerity!—did Monsieur de Silly appreciate the tone as

much as the preoccupation with his character? Be that as it may, henceforth he seemed to find these two negligible young women worthy of his society, and Mademoiselle Delaunay had the “joy to see continually some one whose presence was sufficient in itself to cause absolute happiness.”

The whole atmosphere of the house favoured the expansion of her feelings.

“It was so much in the air,” she says, “to be wholly absorbed in him, that I could follow my inclination to it, without making myself conspicuous. However, my actions were sometimes so marked, in spite of myself, that they could not fail to carry conviction. One day, for instance, I had given him a purse which had just been sent to me from my convent, and he threw his own into the hands of one of his mother’s maids who was not among the least of his admirers. Whether I wanted to have that purse or merely wanted to prevent the other from having it, I caught it in the air before it reached its destination, and that in the presence of the old Marquise de Silly, a very grave and stern woman. . . .”

Thus Mademoiselle Delaunay gloried, woman-like, in throwing all prudence to the winds, as a small tribute to her love. Monsieur de Silly, on the other hand, exercised all that male caution which is so conspicuous whenever passion has not been

roused. The Memoirs strike a little note of irony on that subject.

“The fear of giving me an opportunity to explain myself made Monsieur de Silly very careful not to remain alone with me. I was very determined, on my part, not to say anything to him; yet I desired passionately that meeting which he avoided so studiously, and when I had fully understood the reason of his circumspection, I wished even more fervently to have with him some private conversation which would reassure him and make him understand how far I was from forgetting *what I owed to myself*.”

After that charming little outburst of youthful dignity, she tells, with a smile of humorous retrospection, how the interview came to pass.

“One day, as we were starting out for our usual walk, Mademoiselle de Silly, not feeling very well, decided to remain at home. The old Marquise, anxious to provide entertainment for her son, asked me to go with him. We walked as far as a big meadow, some distance away. He was walking without speaking, much more embarrassed than I was; this little triumph gave me courage to speak, and I remarked upon the beauty of the fields;—but this topic not seeming yet distant enough from the subject I wished to avoid, I left mere earth for the heavens, soared across the entire planet system and firmly did I

hold my ground in those transcendental regions, until we got back to the château."

It was a small triumph, but her first taste of the "bitter-sweet herb of self-mastery"; and after long years had passed, she still remembered the austere joy with which it had filled her young soul. "I experienced," she says, "that delicious exultation which is unknown to those who cannot master the impulses of their heart."

There were less exalted moments to recall also: she saw Monsieur de Silly flirt with rivals, and she was outrageously jealous. One of these rivals had over her the advantage of having travelled in England and in Germany, and thus being a woman with whom a man of the world could compare experiences! Mademoiselle Delaunay resented this bitterly, but to hide her jealousy she made exaggerated advances to her rival; she made all the mistakes which a woman of her temperament and of her inexperience would have made, but she never attempted to pull her hero down to her own erring level by owning to any imperfections in his conduct!

And then the end of her visit to Silly drew near, and shortly before that the departure of the young Marquis, heralded by the arrival of mysterious letters and packets which caused many secret conferences between mother and son, and

great heart-burnings to the young girl who was excluded from the conversations.

“I perceived,” she writes, “that something which was of great importance to him was being discussed, and that he meant to say nothing of it to me. This seemed to me an insult; I no longer spoke to him, and hardly answered when he spoke to me. He noticed my displeasure, without understanding the reason of it, and as he felt real friendship for me, he wished to clear up matters and to appease me. He stopped me, therefore, one day, when I was about to enter the Marquise de Silly’s apartment. I was crossing very hurriedly a hall in which he was wandering about aimlessly, and I pretended not to see him; but he came up to me, stopped me, and made me sit down by his side, saying that he wished to talk to me. He spoke with so much charm and feeling, made up so well for the lack of confidence which had offended me, appeared so touched by my grief, so flattered by its cause, that I never felt more satisfied with him, and more comforted about the power which he had gained over me.”

That unequal relation of rather flattered friendship on one side and of whole-hearted devotion on the other, never changed all through the long years of their intercourse, and in speaking of it Mademoiselle Delaunay never tried to give herself the more interesting rôle of the one who is

sought for. The description of their first parting marks the contrast very sharply; its abandon and ingenuous directness make of it a real little eighteenth-century vignette.

“His departure, though there was nothing final about it, caused me great unhappiness, but I succeeded pretty well in saving appearances. When he said good-bye to us, Mademoiselle de Silly burst into tears, I hid mine from him, for in his eyes I could read more curiosity than emotion; but when he had gone, I felt as if life itself had left me. My eyes, accustomed to seek him only, had no more desire to rest on anything; I no more deigned to speak, since he could hear me no more; it seemed to me that even thought had left me. . . .”

The Marquis de Silly went back to court, and the enchanted palace which he had left behind him turned straightway into a wilderness from which Mademoiselle Delaunay fled back to her convent. A letter from the Marquis reached her there shortly after, a letter which stirred her emotions so much that thirty years later she could still remember every feature of it.

“The shape and the appearance of this letter,” she writes, “have remained so clearly imprinted on my memory, that when I looked for it just now, in connection with what I am writing (for I have always kept it, as I have done with nearly

all the letters which I have received from him) I detected it at once, among a thousand other letters."

Yes, the hand has found it, the eye has detected it at once, the senses have remained in bondage, but the independent spirit adds its comment, piquant enough to be worth recording: "I am tempted to quote the letter here, in order that I may marvel at having been touched by a thing so little touching. . . ."

She quotes it in all its nakedness, and after having read it and some others which followed in the course of time, one is tempted in one's turn to ask wonderingly of what stuff were made these chains which bound Mademoiselle Delaunay for so long. The letters are very wise, sufficiently witty, but selfish and cold to freezing point. Their recipient kept her eyes resolutely closed to this for a long time, and yet, as time passed, the selfishness of the letters increased steadily. When some years later Monsieur de Silly was in Germany, he made of her something between an errand boy and a weekly gazetteer. She owns it, with her usual sincerity.

"His letters adopted by degrees the tone one takes with a business agent. I have received yours of the ...th instant, pray continue to inform me of what is taking place . . . you failed to

apprise me of such and such a thing . . . nothing more. In spite of this," she continues, "I was beside myself at the sight of his writing and of his seal. I awaited with the greatest impatience the day and the hour of their arrival, and I can well remember a quarrel I once had at Versailles with a courier who brought me one of his letters and would neither take my money nor give me my letter, because neither of us had any change. In vain I repeated to him that I did not care about the change, he insisted on going away with the letter, saying coldly, 'I will call again later on.' 'What is this?' said my room mate, waked up by the noise we were making, 'is not a letter as good at one time as at another?' She gave the few pence required, just to get us quiet, and went to sleep again."

Although Mademoiselle Delaunay's portrait of her hero would leave our mind quite unbiassed in his favour, it might be as well perhaps to hear other opinions about him. Grimm calls the Marquis de Silly "a pedant—and not amiable"; Saint-Simon devotes to him a few pages of a peculiarly venomous character. He shows us the cold ambition which is the motive power of all his actions, his steady rise from dignity to dignity, and at last the bitter disappointment which so unhinges his mind that it drives him to suicide. Monsieur de Silly, after being a member of the Privy Council under the Regent's administration,

had hopes of entering upon a ministerial career, but at the eleventh hour his ambition was frustrated. Unable to bear this check which seemed to destroy the efforts of a lifetime, he threw himself from one of the windows in his Château de Silly and was killed. There is only one allusion to this in the Memoirs, and it is full of tenderness and of the wish to excuse and to explain.

“Ambition was the mainspring of his emotions,” Mademoiselle Delaunay confesses, “and perhaps it has obscured his virtues, it was the reason of all his wrongs and the cause of his ruin ; yet in him ambition seemed less a wish to rise above others than a desire to take the place which was naturally due to him.”

CHAPTER III

KNOCKING AT THE DOOR OF FORTUNE

A GREAT misfortune befell Mademoiselle Delaunay just after she had reached her twenty-fourth birthday ; it came so unexpectedly and so swiftly that the catastrophe was upon her before she had had time to face its inevitable consequences. Madame de Grieu fell dangerously ill, and died after a fortnight's illness. With their share of human perversity, her nuns regretted her as much after her death as they had tormented her during her lifetime, yet in spite of their tardy show of affection, they passed over the only practical way in which they could have testified to their devotion.

Madame de Grieu's trusted sister, who had resided with her at Saint Louis, had considerable claims to the position of abbess ; but old intrigues were renewed, and one of the nuns who had once headed the rebellion was chosen for the vacant post. Under these circumstances it was impossible for Mademoiselle Delaunay and her benefactress to remain at Saint Louis. Madame

de Grieu's sister could have retired to the convent of Jouarre to which she belonged, but she would not abandon her niece and the young girl whom she loved as dearly as a daughter—and yet her small income was not sufficient for three people.

During the days of anxious deliberations which followed many offers of help came to Mademoiselle Delaunay; and they prove that she must have understood the delicate process by which love is changed into friendship. Monsieur Brunel, in spite of many past rebuffs, besought her to accept a considerable sum of money, and the Abbé de Vertot, impecunious no more, as it seems, sent her from Paris a letter containing fifty pistoles.

She returned the notes and refused the offers of money, determined to incur no obligations unless she saw a certain chance of redeeming them. Another offer was perhaps harder to refuse: it came from unknown quarters, and an imagination more open to compromise than Mademoiselle Delaunay's might have seen in it an effort at restitution made in memory of Madame de Grieu. It was transmitted through the Frère Maillard, who was then to the famous Père La Chaise what the much discussed "Eminence grise" had been to Cardinal Richelieu. Less skilful, however, than his wily confrère, he did not know how to hide his credit

with the king, and his exile to Rouen had been decided upon and announced before he realised his mistakes.

It was a very innocent intrigue in which he was helping now; he brought Mademoiselle Delaunay the necessary sum of money to pay for her residence at the convent for three months, and the assurance that the allowance would be continued indefinitely, on condition that the recipient would remain at Saint Louis.

The anonymous giver was later discovered to be the Marquis de Silly, and the clause which stipulated residence at the convent might perhaps have betrayed the man who felt so strongly the desirability and the necessity of regulations and limitations! The whole proceeding, however, in its delicate, impersonal generosity, certainly vindicates the character of the man whom former circumstances had somewhat belittled. A letter which he wrote to Mademoiselle Delaunay a little later, when she was staying with some acquaintances at a small hotel in Paris, is a model of excellent feeling and of youthful censoriousness:—

“I hear that you are in Paris, Mademoiselle, and as I bear a great interest in all that concerns you, I learned with great pleasure the decision which you have taken.” (Mademoiselle Delaunay was then endeavouring to obtain a post as governess). “You will perhaps be surprised to

find this letter full of precepts; it is not generally my habit to give advice, still less to write it, but I count you one of my friends, and I feel that I ought to write to you in this vein. I think that with the aim you have in view, the shorter time you stay in furnished apartments, the better chance you will have of ultimate success. The house in which you are now is not one from which I should wish you to make your first acquaintance with Paris life.

“I shall perhaps seem to moralize to excess, but I feel that, in your place, I should avoid any coquetry in dress. Your youth may be an obstacle to you, and it is in your interest to dissimulate it. I should wish you, for the same reason, to exercise a little circumspection in the choice of your friends, and to be more desirous of a reputation for judgment than for wit. I beg you to make use of the simplest expressions only, and above all to dispense entirely with technical terms; although they may be more expressive than others, do not, I pray you, yield to the temptation of using them. Finally, I should wish you to be occupied solely in establishing for yourself a solid reputation, without trying to please through charm and accomplishments. I fear, however, that my last precept may be opposed to nature; the wish to please might be very natural to your sex, and without asking you to reverse the order of nature, let me beg of you to endeavour to please through simplicity only, and not through artifices.

“I have said enough, perhaps too much. Adieu, Mademoiselle. I beg you to be assured that you can confidently count on me most assuredly.”

This letter, less discerning perhaps than well-meant, did not altogether please the girl to whom it was addressed. Advice, however good, may be unreasonable, and although Mademoiselle Delaunay was grateful for the interest shown to her, she frankly protested against the necessity of so much cautioning. It is greatly to her credit, too, that she found the energy to retaliate, for the coldness of the outer world, after her sheltered retreat of Saint Louis, was a paralysing influence indeed. In her Memoirs she laughs retrospectively at the bitter surprises and startling disillusionments of these days. While Madame de Grieu and her nieces were staying with a relative who had not included her in his invitation, she was obliged to accept a very casually proffered hospitality at the country house of some acquaintances. Whilst there she one day had a bad *migraine*, and it did not revolutionise the whole household!

“Before then,” she says, “my *migraines* had been enough to engage the attention of the whole convent, from the abbess to the lowest *sœur servante*! Here they simply sent to ask whether I needed anything! I shall never forget my surprise in seeing treated so lightly what had before been attended by so much pomp.”

She made the last stage of her journey to Paris, where she was to join Madame de Grieu, in a company of which her self-instituted mentor

would have disapproved very strongly. Her travelling companions, Mesdemoiselles de Neuville, had been *pensionnaires* at Saint Louis; the eldest, a girl of eighteen, "extremely pretty, tolerably amiable, with no money and very little distinction," moreover a thorough adventuress by temperament, was secretly starting for Paris with her younger sister and a chaperone; and, "women never having anything more pressing to do than to tell their secrets," she had confided to Mademoiselle Delaunay the object of her journey. It seems that an old Comte de Novion, while opposing her marriage with his son, had fallen in love with her himself. Of late, however, his ardent letters had been scarcer, and his fervour had cooled ominously. Mademoiselle de Neuville had therefore determined to take the matter into her own hands and to bring the pressure of her presence to bear upon future developments. Her enterprising spirit might well have been infectious, but it did not rouse exultant hope in her sober and rather sceptical companion. Mademoiselle Delaunay was starting out to seek her fortune too, but Paris frightened her, and she had nothing wherewith to coax its favours, except the limited resources of her mind and a very small sum of money, borrowed from a distant relative.

For many days her intellectual accomplishments found no market; in vain she peddled them from

door to door, with her letters of introduction and her heavy heart. At last she had to fall back on the small funds she was keeping in reserve, and recklessly devoted all the money she possessed to the paying of three months' residence at the convent of the "Présentation," where Madame de Grieu and her niece had just been admitted as *dames pensionnaires*. She dared not look beyond this three months' respite, and when, towards the end of it, she fell dangerously ill, her one hope was that death might come as a welcome solution to an otherwise insoluble problem. But death did not come; "one seldom dies *a propos*," she remarks, looking back on those days which were so utterly devoid of hope.

The solution came from a most unexpected quarter. Mademoiselle Delaunay had in Paris an elder sister whom she hardly knew, and who was a waiting woman to the Duchesse de la Ferté. Pretty, naturally witty and graceful, she had won the Duchesse's special favour, and might have offered her help from the start, had she wished to do so. But she was jealous of a sister whom she had once, on a visit to Saint Louis, seen courted and adulated. She had broken off all relations with her, and only relented now that she saw her so utterly "fallen from her glory." She rushed in one morning on her convalescent sister, with all the eagerness and importance of a bearer of great

news. On accompanying Madame de la Ferté to Versailles the day before, she had, it seems, told her of the existence of her younger sister, whom she had described as a creature of innumerable talents and fathomless knowledge. "Knowing nothing herself," says the modest object of these laudations, "she found small difficulty in believing that I knew everything. The Duchesse, who was no better informed, credited all she heard, and believed me to be a prodigy!"

In so doing, Madame de la Ferté was only following her natural bent; she was famous for taking innumerable and unaccountable fancies, and no one attached much importance to the ecstasies into which her latest discoveries were wont to throw her. Her imagination, however, was not dependent on encouragement, and once more she had arrived at Versailles, full of a new interest, namely, Mademoiselle Delaunay! She talked of "her prodigy" wherever she went, especially at her sister's, Madame de Ventadour, where she met the Cardinal Rohan, and "said a hundred more things than she had been to' "

Imagination is a kindling fire. By degrees the sceptical audience felt its glow, and, in spite of reluctant commonsense, was drawn by degrees into the magic ring of the Duchesse's fantasies. How could this newly discovered treasure be exploited? What fields would be worthy of

Mademoiselle Delaunay's activities? An eager discussion followed: if, as it was expected, the Dauphine should give birth to a child, and if that child should be a girl, who better than this "genius" could imbue the mind of the little Princess with all knowledge and all the sciences? A splendid sphere of activity in truth, but rather distant still, it had to be owned, and so it was decided, at the Cardinal de Rohan's suggestion, that Mademoiselle Delaunay should enter the convent of Jouarre, where the Cardinal's three nieces were being educated, and that once there, she should "make prodigies of all three. . . ."

Before the girl, who had just been staring into the black emptiness of despair, had had time to feel incredulous at these promised glories, she had been urged by her sister to dress immediately and to go and present her respects to the Duchesse, who was that very day going back to Versailles. There was a prosaic obstacle in the way: the future mentor of royal princesses had no seemly dress to wear, and was obliged to borrow one, just for two or three hours, from a *pensionnaire* at the convent. Thus attired in borrowed clothes, and feeling as uncomfortable in mind as she did in body, she started out with her sister.

The Duchesse was just preparing to dress when they arrived; she at once declared her future *protégée* charming. "She was bound to do so, she

owed it to her imagination," says Mademoiselle Delaunay, before proceeding to describe in her *Memoirs* the very characteristic scene which follows.

"After a few simple and perhaps rather flat remarks which I made, 'Really,' she exclaimed, 'Mademoiselle speaks entrancingly, and she has come just in time to write to Monsieur Desmarests a letter which I want him to receive at once. Here, Mademoiselle, they will give you some paper, you will only have to write!' 'Write what, Madame?' I rejoined, in some perturbation. 'You will turn it just as you like,' she continued, 'only it must be well expressed. I want him to grant me what I am asking.' 'But, Madame,' I objected, 'it would at least be necessary to know what you want to say to him!' 'No, no, you understand.'"

From a few disconnected remarks, the improvised secretary at last succeeded in catching at a guiding thread, and very diffidently presented her production to the Duchesse. Great was its success. "This is exactly what I wanted to tell him," exclaimed Madame de la Ferté, "it is truly wonderful that she should have expressed my very thoughts! Henriette, your sister is astonishing; and since she writes so well, she must write another letter, to my lawyer now, it will be done by the time I am dressed."

A torrent of explanations followed — facts, names, commentaries; the writer was naturally perplexed, and made some confusion in the names. The Duchesse's criticism after reading this letter has a flavour quite its own: "The business is well stated," she remarked; "but I cannot understand how a girl with so much wit could call my lawyer by the name of my attorney." "Thus," says the defaulter, "she discovered the limits of my genius! Luckily it did not entirely rob me of her esteem."

The interview came to an end at last; the unwilling secretary heaved a sigh of relief, and the Duchesse had already stepped into the coach which was to take her to Versailles when a new idea occurred to her. "I think," she said to her *protégée*, "that I had better take you with me; come in, come in, Mademoiselle, I will show you to Madame de Ventadour." With speechless dismay Mademoiselle Delaunay obeyed, and not the least of her anxieties was the thought of the dress which she had borrowed for two hours, and in which she seemed likely to be taken round the world!

The Duchesse was delighted with her plan. All the way to Versailles she talked with even more than her usual verve, and the girl, who felt very keenly the element of danger which lurked in her patroness' versatility, was yet fascinated, in

spite of herself, by her absolute naturalness and her irresistible piquancy. Completely engrossed by her interest of the moment, Madame de la Ferté was making it yield its utmost. Was Mademoiselle Delaunay really acquainted with all the sciences which her sister had enumerated? The Duchesse enumerated them herself, mispronouncing them for the most part, but with a warmth of tone which showed true regard, in spite of unfamiliarity. She would approach them all seriously some time or other, and with one of them at least she felt quite at ease; she put it forward eagerly: "As you are so learned, Mademoiselle," she said, "you will no doubt be able to tell me my horoscope; it is the thing which interests me most in the world."

Great was her surprise on hearing that this profound science had been neglected by her interlocutor.

"But," she exclaimed, "what was the object of studying so many other things, which are perfectly useless?"

The arrival at the Duchesse's apartments in Versailles is somewhat of a revelation as to the kind of *pied-à-terre* with which the great nobles were satisfied when they followed the king to his favourite residence. Of the miraculous effect of true monarchic feeling on weary muscles and

exhausted nerves, we hear a good deal in the *Memoirs* of the time. They have pencilled many a portrait of the perfect courtier, standing obsequiously for hours in the king's antechamber, first on one foot, then on the other, as much a part of the royal furniture as any of the gilded chairs along the walls, and with as little impetus to move away as they; and still the case of Madame de la Ferté throws some sidelights of its own upon this subject.

As a Duchesse, she was spared some, but by no means all, of the physical discomforts of Court life. To her, for instance, belonged by right of rank the privilege of the *tabouret*, that *divin tabouret* as Madame de Sévigné calls it, for the sake of which one of her friends had married the ugliest man in the kingdom. But when the Court was at Versailles, Madame de la Ferté's *tabouret* dwelt *dans les combles* right under the roof, in the dark, garret-like rooms in which its owner herself resided. "It was so high up," says Mademoiselle Delaunay, "that if one of the servants had not carried me up the last flight of stairs, I should never have reached the top."

She reached it, dazed in mind and exhausted in body; she was but convalescent yet, and her nerves were beginning to give way. For several hours she waited for some message from the

Duchesse, who had gone straight to her sister's, Madame de Ventadour. No message came, however, and she was only shaken out of her apathy by the stormy arrival of the Duchesse herself, who on her side had waited all afternoon to exhibit her new discovery, and whose indignation was only equalled by the impetuosity of her reproaches. No excuses could pacify her! What had been a misunderstanding was to her a gross disregard of her commands; Mademoiselle Delaunay's chances were ruined, irretrievably lost!

The storm raged, ran its course, subsided, and was followed by smiling serenity. The loss of to-day, she promised herself, was to be compensated by the glories of to-morrow, and the morrow was filled to overflowing with overwhelming honours: a visit to Madame de Ventadour, to the Duc de Bretagne, to the future Louis XV.—still a child in his cradle—an inspection of all the sights of Versailles, a never ceasing stream of newcomers, anxious to see the “prodigy whose reputation was already spreading!” Madame de la Ferté was filled with exultation, and at the *souper du Roi* to which she dragged her “*protégée*” as a befitting end to so great a day, she insisted on calling the Duc de Bourgogne's attention to her and her innumerable talents and accomplishments.

This introduction to the great world of

Versailles lasted five days. "I felt," says Mademoiselle Delaunay, "as if I were a monkey made to exhibit his tricks at a country fair." There are certain scenes in this little Versailles comedy which, as they appear in the "Mémoires," might have been taken straight from the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme." Here is, for instance, an unconscious parody of Monsieur Jourdain's childish delight in showing off the Turkish speech of his pseudo Turkish friend:

"Madame de la Ferté," says Mademoiselle Delaunay, "having gone to the Duchesse de Noailles, bade me join her there. I arrived. 'This is, Madame,' she said, 'the person of whom I have spoken to you, who is so witty and who knows so many things; *allons*, Mademoiselle, speak! Madame, you will see how well she speaks!' She saw me hesitate and, treating me like a singer who must execute a little prelude in order to clear her voice, and to whom one proposes, for that purpose, a theme which one would like to hear. 'First speak a little about religion,' she said to me, 'after that you will talk of something else!' My confusion was such that it defies description, and I cannot even remember how I extricated myself from this difficulty!"

In spite of so many efforts, the brilliant results pictured by Madame de la Ferté's imagination were not forthcoming. Versailles saw, listened,

commented, and passed on to other interests. The Duchesse was full of indignation, especially against her sister and the Cardinal de Rohan, who had woven the first shimmering threads of that golden vision, the education of the Dauphine's problematic daughter. Now, no one even proposed to pay the "pension" necessary for Mademoiselle Delaunay's admittance into the convent of Jouarre, where the Cardinal's three nieces were waiting in vain to be "turned into masterpieces!"

On the evening of her fifth day in Versailles, Madame de la Ferté returned to her apartments in a fine fury against her unappreciative friends. "Eh bien!" she said, speaking to Henriette Delaunay, "since they want so much pressing, I shall do without them; I am myself in a position to make her fortune. I shall take her into my own household; she will be better off with me than anywhere else."

"This was just what I feared," comments Mademoiselle Delaunay. "I remained speechless and motionless, unable to make up my mind to acquiesce either by word or gesture; luckily she was too excited herself to notice my impassibility."

The few days which the discriminating young girl had spent with the whimsical, inconsequent women had been sufficient to make her feel the danger of the favours held out to her. She had

learned the number of rivals already existing in the Duchesse's household ; she knew that besides her sister, whose jealousy she was naturally unwilling to rouse, there was a certain Louison who had been raised from the position of waiting woman to that of a *confidente*, and also a Sylvine, *belle comme le jour*, a young peasant girl whom Madame de la Ferté had picked up in the fields on one of her estates. "She idolised this nymph, and spared no money to enhance her charms and to cultivate her talents, chief among which was an admirable voice. These fancies were forsaken one after the other, in fact their fate was as inevitable as that of Circe's lovers."

Even the greatest judiciousness would have been of no avail in such a whirlpool of unexpected happenings. No one could calculate the Duchesse's movements, and her unconventionality, though undoubtedly refreshing, was apt to be disconcerting at times. At her country house, for instance, she would assemble round a table not only her maids and valets, but also her purveyors, butchers, bakers, grocers, and play cards with them. "I cheat them," she would whisper delightedly into the ear of one of her house guests, "but then they rob me!"

Gourmets were wise in exercising circumspection towards her invitations, for unpleasant surprises might be in store for them. Her

country-house guests once fared very indifferently, as at the last moment she had refused to take her cook with her. That presumptuous individual had asked her for new spits. "Always new spits!" she had exclaimed, "this is the way in which great houses are ruined. The Maréchal de la Ferté spent twelve hundred thousand francs on spits. No! rather than give in, I will eat my porter's food." And she did, and her unfortunate guests shared it with her, only they had not, to sustain them, the uplifted feeling which comes to those who do great deeds of justice!

CHAPTER IV

THE DUC AND DUCHESSE DU MAINE

MADemoiselle DELAUNAY begged to be allowed some time to consider the proposition of her erratic patroness, though the latter had been drawing a very tempting picture of the things which were to be: a private apartment at her Paris residence, where Mademoiselle Delaunay was to be entirely her own mistress, one of the ducal carriages always at her disposal, and, above all, no compulsion of any kind. This Elyseum was, however, not quite ready; the private apartment, for instance, had yet to be built, but this circumstance was quite a negligeeable one to a mind like Madame de la Ferté's.

After her disappointment at the undiscerning attitude of Versailles, the Duchesse had expressed the decision to go back to Paris immediately, and Mademoiselle Delaunay was thinking with longing of the peaceful retreat at "La Présentation" to which she would return at last, when Madame de la Ferté suddenly changed her mind again. She would go on to Sceaux and show her

protégée to the Duchesse du Maine, the "queen" of Versailles' rival court.

Mademoiselle Delaunay knew the Duchesse du Maine by reputation; there could hardly have been any one in France, however slightly acquainted with court Society, who did not know the "Queen of Sceaux," the one woman who had dared to shake off the heavy yoke of Versailles, to seek pleasure in her own way, and to achieve power by her own methods.

Her unconquerable individuality and prodigious energy were racial traits, as were also her wilfulness and her predisposition to eccentricity. Anne Louise Bénédicte de Condé, Duchesse du Maine, was the granddaughter of that famous Condé who had led the armies of France and used his indomitable courage, his boundless energy, and reckless impetuosity now for, now against, his king, but who, in spite of many errings, has gone down to posterity as "le grand Condé."

His son, Henri-Jules de Bourbon, the Duchesse's father, had inherited his seething vitality and turbulent ambition; but the only healthy field for the development of his energies being denied him in consequence of a natural distaste for war, his activities degenerated into active eccentricities, and his ambition to govern into household tyranny. His wife, a Bavarian princess, reduced by fear to a meek and passive Griselda, endeavoured with



ANNE LOUISE DE CONDÉ,
DUCHESSE DU MAINE.

To face p. 40.

shaking limbs and ever perturbed mind to obey her master's whims. To anticipate them would have been impossible: unexpectedness was the very essence of the Prince's decision; and the entire household was at the mercy of his vagaries. No trust could be placed in the stability of even the most elementary time-sanctioned household rites, and Henri-Jules de Bourbon's family never knew where or when they would dine. If, for instance, dinner had been ordered at Chantilly, Monsieur le Prince would at the last moment decide that he could only dine at his Paris residence; but hardly had the lumbering coach conveying the family to the capital, reached the end of the avenue, when postilions, coachman, and coach would have to turn back, as dinner in Paris seemed impossible.

"Monsieur le Prince," says the luxury-loving Duc de Saint-Simon, "was most magnificent in his liberalities." Magnificence was one of the enduring traditions of Chantilly; its majestic proportions, imposing terraces, and stately gardens proclaimed it equal to any royal residence. The Condés received regally and entertained lavishly the King and a retinue of several hundreds of courtiers, and once when through untoward circumstances something had happened which threw discredit on the perfection of all appointments, their chief steward Vatel, deeming his honour lost, had

not hesitated to take his own life. Monsieur le Prince remembered it well: the tardy arrival of the fish ordered for the royal tables on Good Friday morning, the hurried search for Vatel, the discovery of his desperate deed. There is an echo of all this in one of Madame de Sévigné's letters, of the impression it made on host and guests, on the sensitive opinion of Paris ever ready to extol or to blame, of the effect on Monsieur le Prince, on Monsieur le Duc, whom the episode stamps for ever with a little touch of ridicule. "They blamed and they praised his courage, . . . Monsieur le Prince was in despair. . . . Monsieur le Duc cried, he had counted entirely on Vatel for the comforts of his journey to Burgundy. . . ."

Now that Henri-Jules was head of the house of Condé his liberalities were often as useless as they were extravagant. To ensure comfort for his gallantries, for instance, he bought the whole of one side of a Paris street, had a communication established between all the houses, and furnished them with the greatest luxury. His mind, inclined at all times to deviate from the straight road of commonsense, sometimes lost its bearings altogether, especially during the latter part of his life. During these excesses he used to fancy himself a hound, and pursued with his barkings some imaginary deer. Even the awe-inspiring presence of the King could not dispel

his *idée - fixe*. Out of respect for the august presence he would then desist from his "roarings," but his mouth continued to open and close mechanically in voiceless yapping.

Another of his fancies might have proved fatal to himself; he would at times declare that he was dead, and very logically refuse to eat. Luckily his logic was as easily swayed as that of any opportunist. One of his physicians, a resourceful man, assured him at those times that, although the dead do not eat as a rule, he knew of some who did, adding that his Serene Highness would do well to dine with them. The Prince generally consented quite readily to join the more convivial of the departed spirits, and a sumptuous table was laid for them. The physician, usually present at these "agapes" of a new kind, published later on some of the strange conversations he had heard, and alluding light-heartedly to the famous work written by Fénelon for the Duc de Bourgogne, he used to say that he also had published his "Dialogues des Morts."

The even-mannered, well-regulated Bavarian Princess, whom Madame de Maintenon calls in one of her letters "*la vertue même*," seems to have had as little part in the making of her children's temperament as in the ruling of her house. The Bourbon *joie de vivre* transmitted straight to them from their jovial ancestor Henry IV. was in all

these Condés. The brother of the Duchesse du Maine, Monsieur le Duc, worthy son of his father, and with the same taste for expensive privacy in his *affaires de cœur*, ordered to be built for his mistress, the beautiful Madame de Prie, a coach painted grey on the outside to look like a hackney coach, the inside of which, however, was lined with velvet and brocade, and embossed with solid gold.

The history of the alliances of the Condés in that generation is an illustration of a royal measure which had raised the most violent criticism at the Court. A few years before Anne Louise Bénédicte became Duchesse du Maine, Monsieur le Duc, her brother, had been compelled to marry Mademoiselle de Nantes, the King's illegitimate daughter by Madame de Montespan. Never was Louis XIV.'s stupendous tyranny over all the royal family exercised more autocratically than in this vexed question of the marriages of his bastards. Reluctance, indignation, rebellion, where there was courage for rebellion, were of no avail, and princes of the blood had to obey without reward, where noblemen were bribed by heavy prices. During the latter part of his reign the King seems to have found a peculiar pleasure in ignoring all rules of decency in this matter, and in flaunting before the eyes of all Europe the scandalous alliances between his legitimate and his illegitimate descendants. Even the Duc d'Orléans, future Regent of France,

who stood so near the throne that, at one time, he all but felt the magic touch of the crown within his grasp, had been forced to accept as his wife the illegitimate Mademoiselle de Blois.

Convention has decided that in the husband's power lies the subtle virtue of changing the caste of the woman he weds. No such occult transformation, however, could excuse and glorify the marriage of the Duchesse du Maine, and the alliance of the proud daughter of the Condés with the puny, lame son of Madame de Montespan had roused very active comments. The Duc du Maine had no personal magnetism, no outward fascination wherewith to win public favour. Nature had not cut him out for a hero, and it is difficult even to conjure up his shifty, shadowy personality; but the best silhouette of him, perhaps, is that drawn by Saint-Simon's masterpen, though it is partly dictated by personal spite. "The Duc du Maine," he says, "was a little timid mole, excessively clever and cunning in reaching his goal through underground passages, but blind and groping above ground, shrinking and ineffective." His unconquerable timidity, was partly the result of his deformity which, from his childhood onward, had made him shun public notice; and yet he had been, in a manner, an infant prodigy, whose writings were handed round to a circle of intellectual *connoisseurs*, and who, at the age of seven, had seriously

been proposed by a fawning courtier for a vacant seat at the Academy!

He had been Madame de Maintenon's favourite pupil, and her love for him bordered on idolatry.

"Monsieur le Duc du Maine is ill," she writes, in 1674 to the Abbé Gobelin, her confessor, "... it is a terrible thing to see loved ones suffer. I feel, with excessive grief, that I do not love this child less than I loved the other,¹ and this weakness on my part caused me to weep all through Mass; nothing is more foolish than to love to such excess a child who is not mine, and over whose future I shall never have any influence."

The delicate child's frequent illnesses seem to be an ever-recurring refrain in Madame de Maintenon's letters. "Monsieur le Duc du Maine a la fièvre quarte." . . . "Monsieur le Duc du Maine a la fièvre double quarte." Nothing that devotion could suggest was omitted on her part to strengthen the child's weak constitution; she took him to the wonder-working waters of Barège in the Pyrennees, she even went secretly with him to Holland, to consult a certain famous quack doctor who was supposed to effect miraculous cures. The quack did his best, pulled the shorter leg of his little patient with confident vigour, but when Madame de Maintenon brought her little charge back to France, the

¹ Madame de Montespan's first child who died in 1672.

short leg was longer than the normal one, and the limping had only changed sides.

The tenderness which had watched over the childhood of the Duc du Maine, merged by degrees into the devoted partisanship which sought by all possible means to strengthen his position at Court. No doubt it was not love unalloyed which prompted Madame de Maintenon's efforts; ambition lurked in the background, and also hatred against the Duc d'Orléans and his faction, a hatred ever ready to foster the King's natural distrust of his nephew, but though mixed with baser passions, her feeling had all the force which removes mountains. Her power of persuasion certainly had been strongest in overcoming the King's reluctance to provide an establishment for his illegitimate son. "Ces enfants," he had remarked, "ne sont pas pour faire souche," but Madame de Maintenon had overthrown his objections one by one.

When at last the marriage of the Duc du Maine was discussed, as a real proposition, the King's attention was directed towards the Condé princesses, the three daughters of Mousieur le Prince. They had been waiting for an "establishment" rather longer than would have been admitted by their rank, but the smallness of their stature might well have caused suitors to demur. They were so small, so infinitesimally small, that their

sister-in-law, the former Mademoiselle de Nantes, who never missed an opportunity to prick the Condé pride, had nicknamed them "*les poupées du sang*."

Anne Louise Bénédicté, on whom the King's choice fell at last, was thirteen years old, and the tallest and prettiest of the sisters; the "royal command" which reached Monsieur le Prince on behalf of the Duc du Maine would have seemed preposterous a few years before, but the way to it had been prepared in some measure by the marriage of Monsieur le Duc de Bourbon with Mademoiselle de Nantes, and the Prince de Condé acceded to the King's wishes, won over by the consideration of Monsieur du Maine's very marked favour at Court, and of the enormous riches which he had inherited from the *grande Mademoiselle*.

Had the consent of Anne Bénédicté been asked, she would have given it most unreservedly; but the natural omission of this formality did not trouble her. She wasted not one thought on the unprepossessing appearance of the man whom fate had selected for her husband, but determined without further ado to use his credit with the King for the purpose of scaling those giddy heights to which her ambition secretly aspired. Even without ambition, she would have greeted with delight this open door into the



LE DUC DU MAINE ET MADAME DE MONFESPAN.

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freedom of married life, this way of escape from the restraint of Chantilly, and from the outbursts of rage of Monsieur le Prince, who "beat his wife and his children most brutally," as Saint-Simon assures us. The little Princesse de Condé was passionately fond of pleasure, and her childhood had been utterly devoid of it. Power and pleasure were the two rare gifts which she expected from her new position, and from the day of her marriage she set to work to pursue her end with the most admirable single-mindedness.

Madame de Maintenon also had founded great hopes on the Duc du Maine's marriage, but her hopes were to be utterly frustrated. Her letters about the young bride, written in the first glow of her delight, are full of the tenderest solicitude.

"God grant," she writes in 1692, to Madame de Brion, a *religieuse* at the convent of Montbuisson, "that they (the King and Monsieur du Maine) may be as satisfied with this marriage as I am at present. I am told that she (Madame du Maine) is to spend the holy week at Montbuisson. Make her rest well; she is being worn out here by the constraint and the fatigues of the Court; she is weighed down with gold and precious stones, and her head-dress is heavier than the whole of her person. It will prevent her from growing and from keeping in good health, and she is even prettier without her head-dress than with all her adornments; she hardly

After two or three unsuccessful attempts at finding the ideal spot for her "Parnassus," Madame du Maine persuaded the Duc, at Colbert's death, to acquire Sceaux, the vast domain on which the famous *contrôleur général* had erected a sumptuous palace. Very little remains of it now, and though it is constantly mentioned in the writings of the period, it would be hard to trace its real outlines, through the haze of allegorical effusions lavished upon it, and the processions of gods and goddesses, cupids and sylphs which are for ever winding in and out of its sylvan glades. Its more prosaic admirers, however, give us some facts: the stately gardens had been designed by Lenôtre, of Versailles fame, and the famous Puget had adorned them with gleaming marble statues; beyond the park stretched the softly undulating valley of the Bièvre in all its simple charm and discreet serenity, full of mobile lights and shadows, and of the sound of bubbling water. The hills which surrounded this Arcadia, and the river winding round its confines, made it a little world in itself. Madame du Maine declared it enchanting.

CHAPTER V

THE COURT OF SCEAUX

THE little court of Sceaux had reached the twelfth year of its power, and its "sovereign" was commonly alluded to as the "Divinity of Sceaux," when on one (for her) memorable day of the year 1710, Mademoiselle Delaunay was introduced to it by her indefatigable cicerone, the Duchesse de la Ferté. Though something of its fame was known to her, she was not prepared for the orgy of entertainments—theatrical, intellectual, operatic, gastronomic—which filled the days she spent there. "This way of living," she exclaims with curt disparagement, "seemed unbearable to me."

And indeed the slavery of Court life at Versailles, from which Madame du Maine had fled with such determination, was as supreme liberty compared with the exactions of the Court of Sceaux. To live there was to attempt to move through the glorious inconsequence of a fairy tale, in defiance of all the natural frailties inherent to

the human body. Shame upon him who entertained any idea of sleep at night, or of rest at any time of the day! Let him rank with the unthinking brutes, who could eat of a dish lacking the condiments of anagrams and epigrams, or don his doublet and hose without being reminded of Achilles or Hercules, and straightway informing of this, in gallant verses, Madame la Marquise or Madame la Comtesse next door, who in their turn must needs find inspiration for a worthy retort.

Madame du Maine had decreed that "gaiety should ever be coupled with wit," and not one of the irrevocable laws of the Medes and Persians could ever have called for more herculean efforts than this. Music, dancing, acting, were but the commonplace foundations upon which the fancy of her courtiers must weave ever new and original designs. The Duchesse had excellent professional performers to execute the mechanical part of her entertainments; but the ideas came from her and her satellites. The best dancers from the "Académie de Danse" in Paris were often called to Sceaux, and must often have been dismayed at the extravagances presented to them. One can imagine their amazement at the following fancy, for instance, which sprang from the brain of Malezieu, chief wit of intellectual Sceaux, and occurs in a *divertissement* in which he appears

himself as half-magician, half-quack. Producing a little flask labelled “Esprit de contredanses,” he harangues his audience in the following startling fashion. “The liquid which you see here has virtues which could not be enumerated in a century. Let some one show me the most delicate lady in the world, the least flighty, the most sedentary,—if she allows but one drop of this elixir to fall upon her in the region of the hips, you will see her instantly more agile than a spirit of the air, now clear a haystack at one bound, now soar like a balloon and dance the ‘Fontaine,’ the ‘Pistolet,’ the ‘Derviche,’ the ‘Sissone,’ the ‘Fricolets,’ and ‘Madame la Mare.’”

If adaptability were required of the dancers, great modesty was necessary in the actors. When they left the stage of the Comédie Française in Paris, to answer some bidding from Sceaux, they had to forswear ambition also, for it was Madame du Maine’s habit to claim all the most important parts for herself—comedy or tragedy, a farce or an allegory, she undertook all with equal confidence, and was always ready to spend interminable hours in learning her parts.

“I cannot understand,” said the Duc du Maine, in whom the histrionic faculty was lacking, “why the Duchesse should take so much trouble in order to appear on the *planches* in public, like a mere professional mummer!”

In this case, as in most others, she could dispense with her husband's approval, for she was strongly supported, and by her own set; the Duc de Nevers, the Comte d'Harcourt, the Duc de Coislin, the Marquis de Sassay, the Duchesse d'Enghien, the Duchess of Albemarle, the Comtesse d'Artagnan, the Duchesse de Choiseul figured among the many who formed an assiduous and enthusiastic audience. Even Madame la Princesse came and looked on, wondering each time afresh at the unaccountable tastes of her puzzling daughter; and Monsieur le Prince came too, with a mischievous light in his strange burning eyes which set his whole face aglow. He looked on, and remembering the delight he had taken in donning all manner of disguises to add spice to his *entreprises d'amour*, he found it easier no doubt than his unimaginative wife to account for what he saw.

It was, of course, chiefly to the "intellectual bureau" of the court that Mademoiselle Delaunay was to be exhibited. Where the demand for intellect was so great, a well-organised supply was indispensable, and Madame du Maine had a small corps of *familiers*, whose task and profession it was to be witty, philosophical, ingenuous, or profound, according to the needs of the moment. First and foremost among these was Malezieu, the former tutor of the Duc du Maine; a brilliant



MADAME FILLON.

En vain se livrant aux folles passions
 Mon art seul appaisa la route des passions
 L'Amour ne forma plus d'invités dorés.
 Je reformai ses lois, je réprimai ses passions.



MICHEL BARON,
 OF THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE.

mathematician, an able writer and fertile rhymester, he was the oracle of Sceaux. "His decisions," says Mademoiselle Delaunay, "were as infallible as the conclusions of Pythagoras, and the most heated disputes ceased as soon as some one declared: *he has said so.*"

Among the lesser lights shone l'Abbé Genest, a worthy rival of Molière's *Mascarille*, who had put into verse the whole of Descartes's *Treatise on Physics*; his other claims to intellectual appreciation are unknown, and his former career is hardly enlightening in this matter. After being an ox-driver, he had become an abbé and, *as such*, had been engaged as overseer of the Duc de Nevers's stables; those who now enjoyed his society at Sceaux might often have seen him there discharging his congenial duties among horses and stable-boys, striding along in his cassock, and using with great point and fluency the vocabulary he had acquired in his oxen-driving days!

Others were there who were more obviously fitted to their sphere: the Président Hénault, whose wit is sufficiently guaranteed by the life-long admiration of Madame du Deffand, quickest of all quick wits, sharpest of all sharp tongues; Fontenelle, the pearl of philosophers and scientists, for drawing-room use; and later on Voltaire, in all the verve of unbridled youth.

Madame du Maine took but little heed of

Madame de la Ferté, when the latter, just as full of her discovery as if Versailles had not scorned it, insisted on vaunting her *protégée's* talents. It was not the custom of the divinity of Sceaux to waste her time on other people's interests ; she hardly looked at Mademoiselle Delaunay, and nothing remained to Madame de la Ferté but to turn to Monsieur de Malezieu, and beg the "oracle" to pronounce himself on the value of her treasure. He did so, as we learn from the *Memoirs*, after spending a considerable time in conversation with Mademoiselle Delaunay, and discussing with her several matters in which he found her tolerably well informed.

"His wish to oblige Madame de la Ferté," says the judicious object of this cross examination, "a natural inclination to exaggeration and perhaps also a certain desire to help me, made him confirm all the marvels which had been proclaimed about me. He declared that I was an exceptional person, and people believed it ; they never tired of admiring me. Baron, the famous comedian who had left the Paris stage thirty years before, was just then acting at Sceaux. He prided himself upon his wit, and came, like the others, to examine mine. During one of his visits he said to me ironically that *Les Femmes Savantes* would be acted the next day, and that, without doubt, he would see me there. I made him understand," continues his worthy opponent in this fencing with words, "that 'quand

bien même on jouerait les femmes Savantes, il ne me jouerait pas !' ”

Thus we learn that flattery had its sting at Sceaux, as it has in less Olympian circles.

Mademoiselle Delaunay was much relieved, when at last she was allowed to return to more commonplace haunts. She took leave of Madame de la Ferté, who deposited her at the gates of the convent with “a thousand caresses,” and as many assurances that she would see her again before long. “If the affair at Sceaux is not concluded speedily,” she added, with her customary optimism, “I shall take other measures.”

In truth there were soon palpable proofs that the Duchesse's energies had not abated. A few *chansons* composed by Monsieur de Malezieu were sent to Mademoiselle Delaunay, with a request that she should write an appreciation of them, which Madame de la Ferté would undertake to remit into the author's hands. “I do not remember what I wrote,” says the improvised critic, “many praises apparently, for they brought me a magnificent answer.” It is quite evident that this timely praise did more to convince Malezieu of the writer's wisdom than the most oracular speeches which could have dropped from her lips during their past conversations. His answer, as a pretty example of the lavishness

with which at that time people meted out praise to themselves and to their neighbours, deserves to be read, at least in part.

“ You have persuaded me so entirely of the precision and the infallibility of your judgment that it is not possible for me to differ from you. And now, Mademoiselle, by the knowledge which you must have of your own self, I beg you to tell me what I must think of your merit. Great geniuses like you cannot under-rate themselves. They render to themselves the justice which they extend to others, nothing is more inherent to them than their power of discernment, and even the greatest effort of their modesty can but tend towards gratitude to the first origin, to the Eternal author of their talents. You owe Him, Mademoiselle, more gratitude than any one else, and I, on my side, owe infinite thanks to Madame la Duchesse de la Ferté, for having graciously consented to unfold to me so rare a treasure. I should esteem myself happy, if it were permitted to me, to approach it sometimes, and if I might, were it but once in my life, testify by my services to the esteem and the sincere respect with which I am, Mademoiselle, yours, etc. etc. MALEZIEU.

“ At SCEAUX, on the 30th of May 1710.”

This epistle, with its rhetorical peroration, much encouraged Madame de la Ferté, and she was of the opinion that it should be taken seriously. There were renewed visits to Sceaux

in consequence, days full of *fêtes* and of the assurances of Monsieur de Malezieu's "increasing esteem" but with no substantial results. Madame du Maine made no sign of wishing to add to her intellectual collection, and Madame de la Ferté still oscillated between her wish to secure her discovery for herself and her fear of offending Louison, Sylvine, and other domestic nymphs and tyrants.

A satisfactory solution seemed as far as ever, when at last Madame de Ventadour intervened. She was a well poised, judicious woman, and sincerely desirous of furthering the interests of a talented young girl whose mother had once belonged to her household. She reminded the Cardinal de Rohan of his alluring suggestions, but the Cardinal eluded all responsibility. He did it gracefully and tactfully, as was his custom, but none the less decidedly. In truth little sympathy could be expected from the Cardinal, and this was only one of the many instances which might serve to illustrate his character, as drawn later on by the shrewd and keen-sighted Marquis d'Argenson.

"His politeness," he says of De Rohan, "knows so well how to wear the mask of friendship or of interest that even while one realises that it is not sincere, one is fascinated by it. Whenever you meet him, he seems to have a thousand confidences to make to you, but he soon leaves you to run on to another."

This time the Cardinal masked his indifference behind very befitting scruples; before anything could be done, Mademoiselle Delaunay's religious soundness must be tested, and the exact shade of her convictions ascertained — a very plausible plea from a zealous defender of the true doctrine, at a time when Jesuits, Jansenists, and Quietists made the echoes of France ring with their dissensions, but it ill-befitted the man in praise of whose religion all d'Argenson finds to say is that “he discharged his religious duties without betraying either too much boredom or too much devotion, and that he was careful not to debase the Church in his person by satisfying his taste for gallantry only with great princesses and high born *chanoinesses*.”

As may easily be inferred, the Cardinal did not propose to burden himself with the examination of Mademoiselle Delaunay's religious views—let those decide, he urged judiciously, who knew her in her early years. Monsieur de Fontenelle was accordingly consulted on the subject; but here again indifference threatened to check advance. The philosopher's chief object in life was to keep himself immune from the wear and tear of human responsibilities; he could not allow altruistic efforts to mar the perfection of a constitution which was to carry him serene and safe into his hundredth year; and so, dismissing the subject in

as few words as possible, Monsieur de Fontenelle declared that all he knew about this was that Mademoiselle Delaunay had been brought up in a convent under the Jesuits. Reassuring as this sounded to devotees of religious court etiquette, it was hardly exhaustive, and the Abbé de Fressan, future Archbishop of Rouen, was called in by Madame de la Ferté to conduct the examination on more business-like principles. He arrived, and, according to Mademoiselle Delaunay, his orthodox method in doctrinal examination consisted in an interchange of pleasantries, to which the young postulant's contributions were so apt that they won her the most favourable testimonials!

Her newly-acquired certificates of religious soundness did not lead directly to anything, but why give up hope? There was certainly, as Madame de la Ferté truthfully remarked, "no scarcity of young girls, daughters of great houses, who were in need of a good education, and in still greater need of good principles."

The Duchesse was discussing this question one day with one of those abbés, whose little black *collets* were constantly flitting in and out of *salons* and *boudoirs*, and he bethought himself that Madame la Princesse might be glad to avail herself of such superior talents for the education of her niece, Mademoiselle de Clermont. Monsieur de Malezieu, hearing of this suggestion, thought,

with masculine simplicity, that he could hasten matters by getting Madame du Maine's recommendation, but he only delayed everything by rousing in his patroness the truly feminine disposition to discover a sudden fascination in anything offered to another woman. "If this girl has so much merit," exclaimed the Duchesse with irrefutable candour, "why give her to my niece? Would it not be better to engage her for myself?"

Monsieur de Malezieu agreed most heartily, and the affair might have been considered as settled, had its conclusion depended on more stable factors than Madame du Maine and Madame de la Ferté. A sudden jealousy leaped up between them, a duel of outraged feeling ensued, and grieved astonishment, indignant surprise, haughty aloofness, accusations of double-dealing, afforded fine weapons for either opponent, and were wielded indiscriminately by both.

Meanwhile Mademoiselle Delaunay was still at the convent, still without anything to do, but to bear from time to time with the Duchesse de la Ferté's stormy scenes, to read her volcanic letters, and to steer as best she could between her anger and her infatuation. In this manner months went by, and the young girl's natural diplomacy seems to have forsaken her during that unhappy time; she deplores it herself in her Memoirs, and holds herself responsible to a great extent for the



MADemoisELLE D'ORLÉANS,
DAUGHTER OF THE REGENT PHILIPPE D'ORLÉANS.

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fatal consequences. One or two unwise letters in which she described her position to Monsieur de Malezieu fell into Madame de la Ferté's hands, and brought about a *dénouement* which proved to be a vengeance, planned and carried out in one of the Duchesse's impulsive moods.

A very non-committal letter was the first herald of the catastrophe. It was addressed to Mademoiselle Delaunay by Monsieur de Malezieu and ran thus:—

“At last, Mademoiselle, the time has come. I am bidden by Madame la Duchesse du Maine to inform you that she has determined not to demur any longer. It will be a great pleasure to me, Mademoiselle, soon to be in a position to render you some slight services, and to prove to you in deed that I am, beyond all expression, your very humble, etc., etc.

“*At SCEAUX, on the 11th Sept. 1711.*”

A fulminating epistle from Madame de la Ferté accompanied this, at the end of which she ordered Mademoiselle Delaunay to come to Sceaux the next day, where she would herself present her to Their Serene Highnesses, the Duc and the Duchesse du Maine.

Henriette Delaunay, who had brought the two letters, completed her mission by enlightening her sister as to their true significance. It seems that one of Madame du Maine's waiting-women having

been dismissed, her place had been judged good enough for Mademoiselle Delaunay, whose reputation was very much on the wane. Madame de la Ferté had strongly advocated this as a means of revenge; and she promised herself much pleasure from the spectacle of her former *protégée's* humiliation. "I foresaw my ruin in this event," says the victim of these circumstances, "and I felt that the indelible mark of servitude upon me would always prevent any favourable turn of my fortune. It was, however, impossible to draw back. I could not disown all the steps I had taken to belong to Madame du Maine's household, and I could not insist on any conditions as to my position. I had to bend my neck under the yoke. I arrived at Sceaux in obedience to Madame de la Ferté's orders; she led me in triumph to the Duchesse, who hardly deigned to throw a glance at me, and then she continued to drag me round, chained to her chariot, to all the people to whom I was to be presented; I followed her with the countenance of a vanquished captive. When this ceremonial had at last come to an end, she told me that now I had no more need of her, and that henceforth she would have nothing more to do with me."

CHAPTER VI

GREAT TRIALS AND SMALL TRIUMPHS

EVEN in the half-dazed state in which Madame de la Ferté's departure left her, Mademoiselle Delaunay's heart must have sunk within her when she saw the wretched quarters allotted to her. In her most pessimistic moods she could never have imagined herself in such a hovel. It was so low that one had to bend one's neck in order to save one's head, and its darkness would have satisfied the darkest conspirators. The outer air hardly penetrated into it, and there were no means of heating it in cold weather. Moreover, this commodious residence was to be at her exclusive disposal for the night only, the rest of the time she shared it with one of Madame du Maine's women who did night duty, and who resorted to the *entresol* in the day time, either to sleep or to play cards and quarrel noisily with her husband.

No other refuge remained then to the unwilling witness of these scenes except the distant alleys of the park, and when the rain or the cold drove her indoors she tried to get a little warmth by

walking up and down the half open galleries which ran round the castle.

In the first days of her "servitude" she had hazarded some objections to Monsieur de Malezieu, but "her very humble servant" had forgotten all his former protestations of devotion; he hardly listened to her, and she did not expose herself a second time to his disdain, nor to that of so many others who possessed in an equal degree the convenient talent of opportune forgetfulness.

She schooled herself to indifference, or at least to a semblance of it, and as an aspirant to stoicism, she certainly had excellent opportunities for a thorough apprenticeship. She soon discovered that an absence of fireplaces and the presence of one woman to share an apartment might be indescribable boons; for at the abode of the Duchesse du Maine in Versailles her rooms were always full of stifling smoke, and she had two colleagues to share them night and day. "Never had the smallest ray of light penetrated into them," she moans; "besides, the want of space made it necessary to quarrel incessantly in order to hold your ground, whilst the smoke made you abandon it the moment after. My two room mates were on bad terms with each other, and it was impossible to conciliate one, without alienating the other."

The unfortunate girl, accustomed to the

niceties of speech and mind of cultivated people, felt that there could exist no system by which one might gauge the inscrutable workings of a servant's mind. "I should have liked to conciliate all, but even the cleverest politician would have failed," she exclaims in her despair. "One might gain some influence over people with sane views, familiar interests, ordinary passions, but not over those creatures whose ideas are topsy-turvy, whose reasonings defy reason and whose interests grovel in the dust."

She offended mortally the susceptibilities of the high and mighty corps of the waiting-women ; it was inevitable, but none the less dangerous, for the stability of her position. Her sister, having heard of the difficulties, implored her to mend matters. "What am I to do?" enquired the culprit, with the docility born of utter discouragement. The remedy suggested seemed simple enough—pay a few calls on the divers waiting-women belonging to the house guests, and soothe their ruffled feelings with compliments and advances. Circumstances happened to be favourable, a great number of these "ladies," being off duty, were just then assembled in the common *garde-robe*, playing cards and gossiping.

The women of the Duchesse d'Anjou were approached first, as the highest in the land ; though they were not the rose, they lived nearest

the rose, some of its fragrance might cling to them and make them a connecting link between two hostile species. Alas for the disastrous results ! They asked Mademoiselle Delaunay how much profit she derived from this, how much from that, and as she appeared totally ignorant on these important points, they turned their backs with contempt upon a person so evidently weak-minded and resourceless. The next move was not much happier ; the determined peace-maker seized upon the first individual who hove in sight, and poured upon her all the praise with which she had formerly intended to win the whole corps ; her shortsightedness had played her a trick, she had hit upon the last person to deserve her laudations, and it was so generally evident that a loud burst of laughter greeted her unlucky efforts !

Incongruously enough she seemed doomed to appear stupid in a position which was in reality much below her mental capacities. Partly from timidity and inexperience, partly owing to her bad sight, she committed incredible blunders, some of which she describes in her Memoirs, when she dwells on past miseries.

“ When I entered upon the duties of my office,” she relates, “ I was given as my first task some chernises to cut out. I felt greatly puzzled, for I had never done any needlework, except the

useless fancy work with which one whiles away one's time in convents. I spent a whole day in taking measurements and in trying to carry out this great enterprise ; . . . but, when Madame du Maine put on her chemise she found at the wrist the part which ought to have been at the elbow !”

Luckily for her inexperienced waiting-woman Madame du Maine's petulance was not wasted on the fit of her chemises.

“She asked who had performed this beautiful feat, and on being informed of it she said quite undisturbed that I evidently did not know how to sew, and that henceforth this work would have to be allotted to some one else.”

The Duchesse had need of an unruffled disposition, in order to put up with Mademoiselle Delaunay's gaucheries. The first time she asked for some water, her new waiting-woman poured it over one of her most delicate court dresses, and the unlucky girl could never find anything she was ordered to fetch.

“One day,” she says, “the Duchesse told me to bring her some rouge and a little cup of water from her dressing-table. I went into her room, where I remained bewildered, not knowing in which direction to turn. The Princesse de Guise happened to be passing through, and astonished to see me in this state of confusion,

‘What are you doing here?’ she asked. ‘Eh, Madame,’ I replied, ‘a cup, some rouge, a dressing-table, I can see nothing of all these.’ Touched by my despair, she put into my hands what I would have looked for in vain, without her help. Another day, Madame la Duchesse du Maine, being at her dressing-table, asked me for some powder. I took the box by the lid ; it dropped open, as it naturally would, and all the powder fell on the dress of the Princess, who said quietly : ‘When you take up a thing you should hold it at the bottom.’ I remembered this lesson so well that several days after, when the Duchesse asked me for her purse, I took it up by the bottom part, and was most astonished to see its contents, a hundred louis or so, scattered on the floor.”

What we seem to be has a curious power of making us into what we are, or what we think we are for the time being, and we grope in vain after our personality when untoward circumstances have distorted it beyond the power of even our own recognition. For a time, at least, Mademoiselle Delaunay felt mentally annihilated, and if she ever read over again the letter which the Marquis de Silly had written to her when she entered Madame du Maine’s household, some parts of it must have seemed to her the very bitterest irony.

“Do not,” wrote this cautious adviser, “reveal more of your wit than is adapted to the needs of

those to whom you are speaking. Be satisfied with showing wisdom and pleasant accomplishments. They are far more appreciated than wit; which is apt to be feared."

The recipient of this good advice had come to feel very safe from the complications incumbent on superior qualities of the mind. Had not an old curé strengthened her in this peculiar security by asking her, as she was standing sponsor to a child, if she would be capable of signing her name in the parish register! "This was truly," she remarks, "the donkey's kick."

To make matters worse, she was soon to find out that her position, however lowly, was not out of the reach of intrigues. One of Madame du Maine's ladies-in-waiting, whose chief occupation was to play the part of the classical *confidente* on the Sceaux theatre, took pity on Mademoiselle Delaunay's disconsolate wanderings in the park, and offered her the use of her rooms. At Versailles, shortly after, she asked her to repay her favours by allowing her the use of the *entresol*, if she should happen to need it. Puzzled at the thought that her very unenviable quarters could be wanted, but feeling under an obligation, she acceded to the request. Unluckily the lady in question put the said *entresol* to an injudicious use, the nature of which brought down upon her

the righteous wrath of her lord and master. A scandal ensued, in which Mademoiselle Delaunay's name was mixed up; and this circumstance wounded to the quick the delicate sensibilities of the waiting-women's corps! Mademoiselle Manette, chosen as spokeswoman, was sent to express the general feeling. "This adventure," she said, "is very unpleasant for all of us, people are speaking of one of Madame du Maine's women, and *l'on se voit confondue*." "*Je me trouvais moi-même*," remarks the victim, "*si confondue de vivre avec elle, que je n'aurais jamais pensé que ce malheur dût la regarder*."

From her utter weariness, humiliation, and despair, Mademoiselle Delaunay saw but one escape — death, and she resolved to force open its gates. Before she put an end to her life, however, she would allow her cramped soul one moment of blissful expansion, she would strip her heart naked and revel in its nakedness, she would write to Monsieur de Silly all that she had never dared to say to him. The letter was written, but was never sent. "Having yielded so far to my madness," says its writer, "I felt my reason return to me and resolved to live." She kept the letter "as a warning" against herself, and as a proof of "the excesses into which one falls when one gives way to one's passions." A letter dictated by passion and confiscated by reason has seldom

escaped the flames—the exceptional fate of this one makes it worthy of being quoted :

“Five years ago I saw you for the first time. You treated me with an indifference which seemed to border on contempt. Irritated against you, I sought to discover faults in you, and only discovered charms and virtues. I wished to hate you, and I loved you ; then my sole endeavour was to hide from you feelings which I well believed could not be reciprocated. And yet I could not bear that your insensibility should keep you ignorant of them. The slightest attentions from you touched me very deeply, and so ardently did I wish to be indebted to you that I found reasons for my gratitude even in your coldness. I looked upon it as a laudable effort to tear out of my heart hopes which would prove vain and dangerous. You might even have treated me with harshness, without any other consequence than the increase of the esteem in which I held you, an esteem so perfect and so respectful that it even made me condemn to myself the desire to please you without, however, robbing me of it. Neither a long absence, nor the changes in my fortune, nor the efforts of experienced reasoning have prevailed upon me to make me forget. I went further in my endeavours, I wished to see, and I saw those who were reputed most worthy of being loved. How different from you they seemed to me ! No one resembles you and nothing resembles the feeling which I have for you. I cannot accustom myself to seeing people

in love with each other, and I do not understand that one could love any one but you. What are you thinking at the present moment of the confession which I am making to you? As to me, I feel no shame for it, and a feeling such as mine commands respect. I am not endeavouring to touch you. I only wanted to make known to you what I feel, and my resolution to put an end to my unhappiness. I feel too deeply that I belong to you, to think of disposing of myself without giving you an account of my decision. I await one word from you, and it is the only thing I shall await before bidding you adieu for ever."

Just about that time one of those "civic" agitations which sometimes convulsed the little court of Sceaux, occurred very opportunely to rescue Mademoiselle Delaunay from her state of despondency. From the secluded vantage ground of her *entresol*, unsuspected by any one, she took her humorous share in the agitation. It was due this time to one of the Duchesse du Maine's ingenious institutions for the pursuit of intellectual pleasure. On one of her most creative days she had founded the Order of the "Mouche-à-miel," or "Order of the Bee," of which she was naturally the *grande-maîtresse*. Its motto, "Piccola si, ma fa pur gravi le ferite," was an allusion to her stature and a retort to the taunts of her disagreeable sister-in-law, the former Mademoiselle

de Nantes. The order had its own statutes; and its limited number of members could be elected from either sex. Its ceremonies were conducted with the utmost gravity, and no Chevalier du Saint Esprit could have received his grand cordon from the hands of the king with greater awe than did the chevaliers and the chevalières de la Mouche-à-miel fasten on their shoulder the little golden bee, which was the emblem of their dignity. On bended knee they took the oath which savoured strongly of Malezieu's pomposity, and in which they swore "by all the bees of Mount Hymettus" to be loyal to their queen, and asked that in case of defection their *miel* might be turned into *fiel*, and that other laboriously thought out *jeux de mots* might be turned into serious realities, expressly for their chastisement.

The election of a new member was to take place a few months after Mademoiselle Delaunay's arrival, and the whole court was in a flutter of excitement. Among a great number of candidates, the most eligible, it seems, were the Comtesse de Brassac, the Comtesse d'Uzès, and the Président de Romanet. Whether the *grande-maîtresse* was influenced by the latter's dignity or by his sex, is a debatable point; at any rate he gained the victory over his two feminine rivals. They owed it to themselves and to their sex to recriminate, and the whole of Sceaux was

formed into two hostile camps bandying at each other accusations of unfair dealings and illegal procedure.

Mademoiselle Delaunay, in her *entresol*, with plenty of leisure for mental gymnastics, gathered up these complaints which were rending the very air, and amused herself by writing them up in legal style, giving free play to the tone of chicanery with which Madame de Grieu's legal difficulties had made her familiar. She even went so far as to send them in the form of a petition, and in the defendants' name, to the *Président de Romanet*. This composition, small as may seem its chances of providing entertainment, engrossed Sceaux for the better part of two weeks. Monsieur de Malezieu, in his quality of first wit, was the first to be charged with the authorship; he regretfully denied it, and the accusation went on from greater to lesser until it fell upon the most witless. "But no one," sighs Mademoiselle Delaunay, "ever thought of me as the author!" She had to comfort herself with the silent enjoyment of the fruitless search, and by composing thereupon a few verses which nobody ever read, until she put them in her *Memoirs*.

Her next interference with public affairs met with more success, and she owed it to the famous Monsieur de Fontenelle and the obscure

Mademoiselle Tétar. This damsel proclaimed that she had been chosen by the powers above as an instrument for occult demonstrations. All Paris went to see her, and Monsieur de Fontenelle went too, not from mere curiosity, like the common herd, but as a champion of the reliability of Nature's character, and in order to expose these alleged insults to the immutability of her laws. His investigations lasted longer than would have been deemed necessary, and were inspired, so it was rumoured, less by an interest in science than by a quite unscientific infatuation with Mademoiselle Tétar's natural charms. Great was the merriment over the demi-god's subjugation, and even his Olympian calm was at length stung into retaliation, so numerous were the merciless gibes thrown at him.

In the midst of the battle of words and jeers which ensued, Mademoiselle Delaunay, who was always staunch in her friendships, wrote to Monsieur de Fontenelle a letter assuring him of her partisanship and laughing at his detractors.

This letter was not particularly witty, one would now consign it to the waste-paper basket without a regret, even if one were the author of it, but in that golden age, when intellect was at such a premium, it met with a wonderful fate. Fontenelle, being one day at the Marquis de Lassays, and finding himself again a butt to the

usual pleasantries, drew his letter out of his pocket and showed it all round, saying: "This contains better pleasantries." It was read by all who were present, it was copied and circulated at large. "All the Germans here," wrote Monsieur de Silly from Friburg later on, "wish to have a copy of it."

The Duchesse du Maine was one of the last to ask for the wonderful letter, and discovering that all who were present at Sceaux had a copy of it in their pocket, she began to realise the glory emanating from her household. "She read the letter," reports Mademoiselle Delaunay, "approved of it, and understood that she could derive greater profit from me than she had done so far. I myself began to wish, like all the others, to possess a copy of my letter and to think highly of it."

CHAPTER VII

SLAVES OF PLEASURE AT SCEAUX

THE Tétar episode had done a great deal towards Mademoiselle Delaunay's advancement. Now her Serene Highness did condescend sometimes to hold some real conversation with her, she seemed to appreciate her mind, and even allowed her occasionally to be present at the discussions of the wits of Sceaux. Henceforth Mademoiselle Delaunay was not quite a waiting-woman, but she was nothing else yet, and woe to her if she presumed to cross the boundary lines. It was just then that every evening in the Duchesse's boudoir, the Latin poem, *The Anti-Lucretia*, used to be read and discussed before a fluttering, chiefly feminine, audience, by its exquisite but rather malicious author, the Cardinal de Polignac. The lonely tenant of the dark *entresol* hungered for intellectual pastures, and she dared to beg for admittance. The very genius of pride and vainglory must have been at work in her mind, when she had thus presumed to ignore proper distances; she realised it too late alas,

when a crushing and peremptory refusal brought her to her senses!

To balance small failures, however, there were small successes: the number of her friends increased steadily, and it happened more and more frequently that some of them found their way to her *entresol*; "though," she said, "it was a difficult matter to discover me under the stairs where I made my residence." To her came one day the Abbé de Vaubrun, one of those *petits collets* permanently attached to the court of Sceaux. He was full of a new plan for a totally novel *divertissement*, very elated at his ideas too, and his elation was pardonable indeed, for it must have needed a prodigious inventiveness to think of something new in the face of the endless succession of *fêtes*, ballets, and masquerades through the medium of which mythology, history, and allegory paid their homage to the queen of Sceaux. One cannot help thinking that there must have been an element of satiety in the fact that the *dénoûment* of these elaborately constructed intrigues could always be apprehended with absolute certainty. Was it not irksome to the Divinity of Sceaux to know, without any possibility of doubt, that the treasures for which Merlin and a procession of lesser magicians were searching so diligently, would inevitably prove to be the treasures of her own incomparable mind, and that the lost girdle of Venus would

naturally be discovered encircling her own waist. But no, she never wearied of these flatteries, was she not the Divinity of Sceaux, and do not the gods drink nectar for ever, with ever-smiling serenity?

The Abbé's original idea was not quite as original as he thought; it needed, as usual, the help of allegorical figures for its interpretation; but its novelty lay in the proposal to exploit the Duchesse's peculiar partiality for the night, as opposed to the day, and in the suggestion to make that the keynote of the whole. Night was looked upon with great disfavour at Sceaux, and sleep stood in utter disrepute.

“Detestable sleep!” exclaim some verses dedicated to the Duchesse, “leave our enchanted fields, and go to feed the laziness of the monks. Go to fatten sluggish canons, and to instil into their numb senses the elixir of thy poppies. These dullards think to lengthen their life by the means of sleep, but they are dead already, and sleep has performed upon them the offices of Atropos!”

This was very well for the Duchesse, who seems to have really been immune from most frailties of the flesh; but the strongest courtier's instinct must have been needed in others, to keep up nodding heads, to keep clear the weary eyes clouding over with sleep. There is no miracle that is impossible, however, to the true monarchic

feeling, and night after night the subjects stayed awake with their queen; they professed to share her horror for the garish light of day, and here was a self-sacrificing courtier actually ready with suggestions for further night revels! His idea was to make Night appear as an allegorical figure, in order to thank Madame du Maine in well-polished verses, of course, for the preference accorded to her. *Noblesse oblige* . . . there would henceforth be less sleep than ever! As the Abbé's strong point was not the making of verses, he asked Mademoiselle Delaunay to compose the harangue of Night, adding gallantly that she would also be the one most capable of delivering it. She acceded to his request, and this was the beginning of the famous *Grandes Nuits de Sceaux* — a harassing series of night-entertainments, applauded by many, cursed perhaps by not a few in the safe sanctum of their inner privacy.

“The only merit of the first performance,” says its modest author, “was its element of unexpectedness. I executed it very badly, for I was seized with terror at the idea of speaking in public, and remembered only very insufficiently what I had to say!”

In spite of this, she was asked several times again to recite and even to sing, until it was proved that her stage fright was incurable; then

she was allowed to retire, and was granted as a compensation the dignity of an advising member to the committee for the planning of the *Grandes Nuits*.

It was no doubt a great honour, and not a sinecure ; none knew it better than the unfortunate Monsieur de Malezieu, President of the Committee, and reponsible for all its vagaries—reponsible also, alas ! for any absence of novel ideas. The stress of circumstances made him at last turn to Fate for help, and he instituted the so-called, “literary lotteries” which must have daunted the most dauntless. The letters of the alphabet were put in a bag, into which all the members of the committee had to dip, and to draw out, each in turn, the fateful letter from which there was no escape. “S” stood for a sonnet—it was a favourite letter, and probably elusive in consequence ; “F” meant a fable ; “C” demanded a comedy ; alas for the serious-minded who drew it ! “O” was the most formidable. He whose unlucky hand fell upon “O” had to produce a whole operetta unless he could attune his mind to the lofty strains of an ode—in which case his levity was excused in favour of the nobler sentiment. The last of the *Grandes Nuits* was composed entirely by Mademoiselle Delaunay, and she was publicly proclaimed the author of it. It was a great success, and could hardly have failed to entrance the spectators, so

deftly had she mixed into it the ingredients which make that special incense which is peculiarly agreeable to the nostrils of gods and semi-gods.

The main thread, connecting more or less successfully the various incidents, was the idea that "good taste" had found a refuge in Sceaux, had selected it as a permanent residence, and was the presiding genius over all Madame du Maine's actions. The author's own account of her production, as it appears in her *Memoirs*, is not entrancing, and it is a relief to get to the end of her description: "At last the Genii of Laughter appear and erect a stage for the performance of a comedy in one act, the grand finale of the whole." The theme of this play was one of the Duchesse's latest intellectual passions: the search for the "magic square," a pursuit which had kept Sceaux in breathless suspense for several weeks, and specially harassed poor Monsieur de Malezieu, who was occasionally obliged to pay dearly for his title of "Euclid of Sceaux." The success of the comedy, whatever its merits or demerits may have been, was assured by the fact that Madame du Maine herself was to act the chief part in it—a circumstance which made it appear perfect to all eyes, her own included.

It was a great occasion for Mademoiselle Delaunay, and was marked by the bestowal upon her of a very special favour—a miniature portrait of the Duchesse represented as Hebe. As a likeness,

it may have been indifferent, but it was received with transports of delights which were duly modelled into enthusiastic verses. The Duchesse answered these delirious protestations with four lines, which sound refreshingly simple.

“ Vous me payez avec usure,
Launay, d'un médiocre don,
L'original et la peinture
Ne valent pas votre chanson.”

The enormous expenses entailed by these gorgeous night entertainments made it at last necessary to interrupt them; had it not been for this prosaic but merciful circumstance, the court of Sceaux might have perished from exhaustion, without even risking a stifled yawn! But alas! the load had only been shifted; the Duchesse having retrenched, now went to the other extreme, henceforth only the pure treasures of the mind were to be expended on pleasure, and this called for the most strenuous mental efforts. One dined and supped and lived on “quatrains” and “sextains” anagrams, epigrams, and enigmas. Some happy minds would at times produce quite tolerably pretty lines; Saint Aulaire, for instance, when he gently railed at the Duchesse for her excessive interest in philosophy.

“ Bergère, détachons-nous
De Newton, de Descartes,
Ces deux espèces de fous
N'ont jamais vu le dessous
Des cartes.”

Fontenelle, too, was occasionally quite felicitous. It was he who at one of the Sceaux suppers made, to a riddle proposed, the happy answer which has become classical: "What is," some one asked, "the difference between a clock and the mistress of the house?" "The one records the hours, the other makes you forget them," answered quickly the gallant Fontenelle. ✓

On the other hand, it is hardly to be wondered at that sometimes the Muse refused to be coaxed, and that De Malezieu being one day called upon to "versify" could find nothing but these lame and pathetic three lines:

"Lorsque Minerve nous ordonne,
On a toujours assez d'esprit;
Si l'on n'en a pas, elle en donne."

Alas! even Minerva's wit ran short sometimes, as is sufficiently proved by her anagram on the Abbé Charles Genest, who shared with the immortal Cyrano the inconvenience of having too large a nose. The Duchesse was lost in deep thought for a while, considering with knitted brows the letters which made up the Abbé's name, then suddenly clapping her hands, she exclaimed triumphantly, "*Eh, c'est large nez!*"

This brilliant anagram is preserved in the *Divertissements de Sceaux* with other gems of its kind. Even Mademoiselle Delaunay quotes from them with complacency sayings which

would have made her yawn in any other atmosphere; but sublimity is a powerful narcotic to common-sense. The Duc du Maine was the only one at Sceaux who was excluded from intellectual *divertissements*. The Duchesse had recognised from the first her husband's peculiar talents, and had allotted him his part accordingly. For him the patient toil, the cunning machinations, the persevering cringing by which credit and influence are won at Court, for her the benefits attained. He was continually at Versailles, or in the vicinity of the King, where the true courtier must ever be seen, and if by chance he was at Sceaux, he was under strict orders for the use of his time. While his guests were discussing the *Pluralities of the Worlds* he was relegated to one of the pavilions at the far end of the park, and advised to cultivate his talent for figures, or as a relaxation was sometimes allowed to draw designs for flower-beds or new avenues in the park of Sceaux. He submitted readily enough, as a rule, rebelling only in a few cases, when provocation proved too great. It had happened, for instance, in connection with the *Anti-Lucrèce*. In spite of a literary reputation achieved at the early age of seven, the Duc had been excluded from the readings, and his sense of justice was sore within him. At the far end of the park of

Sceaux, in his secluded tower, he meditated upon means of retaliation, and one day, tremulously, for he understood his position, yet with a pathetic eagerness for praise, he brought his wife a French version of the *Anti-Lucrèce*, the first part of which he had just completed. Great was the Duchesse's indignation. "Yes," she said to him with fine scorn, "you will wake up one day to find yourself a member of the Academy; but the Duc d'Orléans will have been appointed Regent of France!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAGIC END OF A LONG REIGN

MEANWHILE history was shaping itself, and Mademoiselle Delaunay was not to be condemned altogether to the lonely exclusiveness of Sceaux. Versailles, which once had been the object of the Duchesse du Maine's contempt and aversion, was rapidly becoming a strong magnet for her ambition. From the powerful though still hidden drama, which centred round the King's residence, emanated an atmosphere which drew her irresistibly to watch for coming events. A catastrophe was impending, inevitable—the disintegration of the country, the falling of the old *régime*? Who knew! and who knew how the spoils would be divided!

France, struggling in the throes of an endless fight, the war of the Spanish succession, was vainly trying to solve an insoluble problem — how to raise funds from exhausted sources. For the first time the King had been known to throw up his hands publicly, to break down in the very

presence of his council, and to declare that the situation was hopeless. Le "Roi Soleil," who had run his course with such splendid ruthlessness, was becoming human at last; and there was something demoralising in that spectacle. Once already, on addressing his Breton States on the subject of a new tax voted unanimously by them, he had surprised his audience by using the word "gratitude" towards them, and he himself had started visibly as this unaccustomed word had fallen from his lips. Private financiers, *gens de peu*, as the haughty Saint-Simon described them, were admitted into the inner presence to discuss with the King himself, as man to man, the matter of loans and the raising of funds. Times were changed indeed!

The country had hardly recovered from the terrible famine which had followed upon the hard winter of 1709. It had been the haunting horror of the Dauphin's last months, and he had not dared to show his face in the streets of Paris, where clamours for bread and entreaties surged round him like the waves of an angry sea. He was dead now — his unheroic soul had escaped from threatening responsibilities, and the King, an enfeebled old man, was wearily continuing the struggle.

In 1710, just before the death of the Emperor of Austria had turned the course of events by directing English apprehensions towards Austria's



PÈRE LE TELLIER.

pretensions, Louis XIV., to provide for the gigantic expenses of the war, had declared a tax of one-tenth on all income. This new burden had raised a storm of rebellion, and while the country was groaning under ever-renewed impositions, a kind of reign of terror had been inaugurated in the Church by the coming into power of Father Le Tellier, confessor to the King. He had succeeded Père La Chaise in 1710, and the hold which he had immediately obtained over the King's mind had an element of the sinister in it. Totally devoid of conscience, devoured by ambition, and shrinking from no crime, he had deliberately set to work to exile from the Court, and to oust from positions of importance all those who were not ready to be his willing tools. By his system of intimidation and delation he brought about the downfall of much that was still honourable in the Church, and there were priests, bishops, and even cardinals, who lived in daily fear of the *lettre de cachet* which would send them to the Bastille.

Madame de Maintenon disapproved, but remained silent; the burden of her life at Court was becoming intolerable to her—her private letters at that time bear ample testimony to this. As to the King, he was entirely subjugated. Le Tellier was his conscience; he was the arbiter and the fate of France. There had been a startling proof of that in the case of the recently proposed income tax.

While this measure was under discussion the King had seemed harassed and preoccupied, and his confessor had asked the reason of this. Louis had expressed his many scruples. "Oh!" Le Tellier had replied, "these hesitations are a proof of too delicate a conscience! however, in order that your Majesty's mind may be quite at rest, I will consult the casuists of my order."

A few days later the confessor assured the King that the matter in question was not one to cause scruples, since a monarch is always, and in any case, the real owner of all the possessions in his kingdom. "You have relieved my mind very much," sighed the King, "now I shall feel at peace about this," and the tax was imposed.

Father Le Tellier exercised his ruthless power with all the more violence, because he could not but fear that his days were limited. The Jesuits were loathed, their tyranny still held many souls in bondage; but rebellion was astir, and the number of Jesuit confessors whose supreme ministrations at death-beds had been deliberately refused, was becoming the scandal of the order. It happened more and more frequently that the spirit standing on the threshold of Death cast off its bondage, and there were some striking defections. Monsieur le Prince himself, father of the Duchesse du Maine and courtier *par excellence* declared his religious standing at the last by an

act of stupendous independence. He closed his doors to his own Jesuit confessor, and sent for the Père la Tour, a member of the Oratorians, and the *bête noire* of the Jesuits. A Stuart princess, Louisa Mary, followed suit; she refused on her death-bed to give admittance to her Jesuit confessor, and sent instead for a poor priest of the parish of Saint-Germain des Prés.

The Church and the State, traditions and laws, all that had been and had appeared immutable, had reached an unexpected turning point—and France was about to enter the tragic year of 1712. A few months before the Dauphin had died, and the country had mourned but little over this loss, all hopes being centred round his son, the Duc de Bourgogne. To him life had given of its best gifts; unbounded energy, a clear vision, a rich imagination, wisdom and sympathy beyond the ken of his contemporaries, a passionate desire to realise great aspirations. His young wife, the Duchesse de Bourgogne, the Rose of Savoy, as history has caressingly named her, illumined the gloom of Versailles with the young light of her gaiety and of her charm. Louis XIV. idolised her; her naturalness and her spontaneity were as draughts of cool spring water to the jaded sensibility of Madame de Maintenon. The Court, while shaking its head over her impetuosity, or envying her popularity, was conquered

by the rare quality of her youth and of her vitality.

No heirs to the throne ever possessed the heart of the country more entirely than the Duc and the Duchesse de Bourgogne. Alas! before the second month of the year 1712 had reached its end both were lying dead on their bed of state, and the same funeral procession which carried their remains to Saint-Denis conveyed also the body of the little Duc de Bretagne, their eldest son, who had died a few days after them.

Then a panic seized the minds of the public, the word "poison" was whispered in dark corners, and grew into a rumour which arose threateningly, and mounted higher and higher, until the ugly tide besmirched the name of the King's own nephew, the Duc d'Orléans. Public voice called him *empoisonneur*, and the King, his judgment obscured by infection from public passion, very nearly yielded to his nephew's indignant request that he might be arrested publicly, and with him his famous master in chemistry, Hombert, and that both might be kept prisoners until the outrageous allegations made against them should either be proved or disproved. Luckily the King's arm was stayed in time, and the Royal House of France was saved from an action, the very finality of which would have indelibly impressed the public mind with a conviction of guilt.



ADELAÏDE DE SAVOIE,
DUCHESSE DE BOURGOGNE.



DUC DE BOURGOGNE

Passion subsided ; reason and the medical faculty spoke enlighteningly, the King himself remembered with what inner conviction he had once exclaimed : “*Mon neveu est un fanfaron de crimes.*” Whatever the suspicions had been, the Duc d’Orléans’s guilt was evidently quite out of the question ; but as dramatic agitation died out, the gloom which settled upon the Court seemed the heavier. In the beginning of March 1712 Madame de Maintenon writes to the Princesse des Ursins :

“All is death here, Madame, life has fled from us ; this princess (the Duchesse de Bourgogne) put life into everything, charmed us all ; we feel still heavy and stunned with our loss, and every day makes us realise it more. I cannot see the King, nor think of this loss without utter despair.”

All that meant hope and youth seemed to have deserted Versailles ; of the sons of the Dauphin only one remained, and the policy which aimed ever at preventing younger sons from being dangerous rivals to the heir had been entirely successful in the case of the Duc de Berry. The King had had many proofs of it, and was soon to witness a public exhibition of his grandson’s pathetic incapability. In consequence of the treaties made at the close of the war of the Spanish succession, the Duc de Berry was to sign, in the presence of the assembled Parliament, a formal renunciation

to all claims upon the Spanish throne; he was, upon this occasion, to repeat a very short speech which had been written for him, and which he had learned by heart. "Monsieur," he began, addressing the President of the council, "Monsieur, . . ." and after vainly repeating that word five or six times he broke down entirely, and there was nothing left for Monsieur le Président but to wait tactfully the length of time which the speech would have taken, and then to dispel the general embarrassment by answering it, as if it had been delivered. Thus at least the remote parts of the assembly hall could be under the illusion that the Prince had spoken. Duclos, who in his secret Memoirs, gives many details about this, tells of the Duc's return to Versailles in gloomy silence and with downcast eyes, he tells of his passionate outburst, when he reached at last the privacy of his apartments.

"I was a younger son, they were afraid of me," he sobbed, denouncing the unfairness of the education which had made him what he was, "they tried to make an idiot of me, and they have succeeded, they never taught me anything, except hunting; I am incapable of doing anything else."

So many healthy shoots had, in this way, been maimed and cut down to preserve the strength of the main trunk that now after the lightning

of fate had struck it, it stood strangely stripped and isolated. The heir to the throne was a child of two, whose feeble health struck dismay into the hearts of loyal subjects, and raised hopes in those disloyal ones who were beginning to count on it as a strong asset. The Duc d'Orléans's party on one side, the Duc du Maine's faction on the other, were busy building plans and hopes for a near future. Madame du Maine, without seeming to descend from the clouds where she dwelt with her sister divinities, her intellectual puzzles, and her complicated diversions, was yet secretly bracing herself to a political struggle.

The King's apathy increased from day to day; his body, so pitilessly trained to defy all onslaughts of old age and fatigue, seemed to show the same immunity as before; he dressed, undressed, dined, supped, played cards, hunted, drove the Royal coach under the perpetual observation of hundreds of critical courtiers. Madame de Maintenon may moan: "My poor head feels as if it had been quartered between four horses, . . ." but no complaint escapes from the King's lips. Only his spirit sinks more and more into the slough of indifference and despondency—no effort to rouse him is of any avail, and Madame de Maintenon driven by black despair into total recklessness of expression is heard to exclaim: "Quel supplice d'avoir à amuser un homme qui n'est plus amusable!"

CHAPTER IX

THE KING'S WILL

THE reproof quoted at the end of Chapter VII. was undeserved; the Duc du Maine had worked hard in his own subterranean way, and had amply proved that his talent for intrigue could be relied upon. In concert with Madame de Maintenon, his faithful ally, he had diligently helped to promote all those lapses from etiquette, those confusions of ranks and rights which mark the end of Louis XIV. reign, and which were so propitious to a *situation irrégulière*. What barriers could not be overthrown at a time when the old order of things had been so entirely reversed that a bourgeois minister now addressed as "Monsieur" an hereditary noble, who in reply called him "Monseigneur," and when Madame de Maintenon's decision to remain standing at her receptions had levelled all hereditary rights to sit, to a polite obligation to stand.

Monsieur du Maine had ever been vigilant at his post, watching for the opportune moment to increase his credit, hiding under the mask of

filial devotion his determination to conquer any possible chance of precedence, to pick up any stray favour which might fall from the King's hands. His efforts had been well rewarded; from year to year his family had risen to greater consideration. After being declared *légitimés*, his brother, the Comte de Toulouse, and he had been raised to the dignity of Peers of the Realm, they had later on been granted equal rights with the Princes of the blood, and in 1714, after death had so fatally decimated the Royal Family of France, they had tasted their final triumph in listening to the proclamation which declared them heirs to the throne.

These were giddy heights to tread for the bastard cripple and his *poupée du sang*, but Madame du Maine was prepared to climb higher still; she walked on the clouds as in her natural element, exulting over the realisation of that which she had expected with perfect confidence. The Duc, on the other hand, lived in daily terror of the abysses which loomed by the side of the proud heights. He read mysterious threats in the omniscient Saint-Simon, whenever he met that implacable inquisitor, and he could not think without a shudder of the awe-inspiring words which the King had addressed to him on a day which had been one of the memorable landmarks in his progress. The Royal will had just been

signed, and the King, pointing to it, and inclined perhaps to take a revenge for the coercion to which he had been submitted, had thrown a significant glance at his ambitious cripple: "You wished it," he said, "and it is done, but remember that without me you would be nothing, and see that you keep your power when I am gone—if you can!"

It had been the intoxication which comes of success which had plunged Madame du Maine into the reckless extravagance of the *Grandes Nuits*. "The Princesse's taste for pleasure," reports Mademoiselle Delaunay, "had then reached its zenith." Towards the end of the year 1714, however, there are new symptoms in the air, and though they are not yet noticeable to many, the keen mind of the chronicler of Sceaux has detected and understood them.

"The King's health was beginning to sink visibly," she remarks going straight to the root of the matter, "no one wished to refer to it and every one affected to disbelieve it, but in the midst of the pleasures which seemed to solely occupy her, Madame du Maine was more watchful than ever over the fortune of the house with which she had allied herself and the establishment of its power on a sure basis."

The Duchesse felt, at this important juncture, how indispensable it was to know fully the



LOUIS ALEXANDRE DE BOURBON
 Comte de Toulouse &c. Grand
 des Mers, Chef et Surintendant
 Navigation de la France Pour
 et Lieutenant general pour le Roy, en
 Prince Nacquit le 6. de Juin 1678, et fut Legitime Fils Naturel du Roy Louis le
 Grand, En Novembre 1681, &c. il fut fait Chevalier des Ordres du Roy, en,

BON LEGITIMÉ DE FRANCE
 Admiral du Grand Moutre
 General du Commerce et de la
 En Novembre 1683, Gouverneur
 la Province de Guyenne, Ce Jeune

530 - 1777

LOUIS DE BOURBON,
 COMTE DE TOULOUSE.

decisions expressed in the King's will, and in order to gain that knowledge she decided for the first time to interfere openly with the affairs of the State. So far she had only worked through the secret agency of the Duke, goading on pitilessly what she called his "damnable apathy," railing at his fears, ridiculing his hesitations, and terrorising him into a frenzy of action. His native prudence had saved the situation in spite of all, and now, as events proved, her inconsequence was to endanger it seriously. She had determined to gain a knowledge of the King's will, but even whilst working for this end she was seized most inopportunistly with one of her father's fits of indecision.

After having with great difficulty obtained, through Madame de Maintenon's intermission, the permission to see the Royal will, she suddenly refused to take advantage of this, on account of the condition that the knowledge gained should entail absolute and inviolable secrecy. This condition, she maintained, would paralyse all efforts by which she might otherwise have fortified her position. Her arguments were not particularly conclusive, nor did they appear so to those chiefly concerned: the Duc du Maine and the Comte de Toulouse. Should the will be read? should it not be read? the question was discussed for several days, and at last decided in the negative. But

hardly had an intimation of this been despatched to the King, when the decision was bitterly deplored by those who had taken it, and a council was appointed to consider the best means of repairing this grievous error. The council, composed of the premier president, Monsieur de Mesmes, Monsieur de Malezieu, and Monsieur de Valincourt (of the Comte de Toulouse's household) deliberated at length in the presence of the parties concerned. The invaluable advantage of having a full knowledge of the will having been refused, nothing remained but to beg humbly for a partial knowledge, one clause of it at least. Which clause should be chosen as the most significant?—more deliberations ensued. The Duchesse was as sure of being able to discover the “magic unit” which would contain the whole, as she had once been convinced of finding the “magic square”; but her extravagant schemes having been rejected one by one, the Comte de Toulouse's proposal was at last accepted. He had, with the wisdom which was to keep his craft steady in the midst of the universal wreck, hit upon the very point which was most vital, and which was in a way the “magic unit.”

The point at issue was to discover if Louis XIV. was re-establishing the claims of his grandson, Felipe V. of Spain, to the throne of France; failing which, the future King being still a child,

the authority would naturally devolve upon the Duc d'Orléans, the King's nephew, and he would be the one rival against whom all forces should be concentrated. The request was presented and granted, and it was then known that Felipe V. was still barred from the line of succession. This discovery led to a second very grave mistake in the tactics of the court of Sceaux. In order to ingratiate themselves with a man who might be a power, although they did not mean him to be *the* power, they informed the Duc d'Orléans of that most weighty of the King's decisions.

Deliberately to put a weapon into the hand of the man from whom you fear an attack seems absolute madness. At that time, however, the respective position of the Duc d'Orléans and the Duc du Maine was not clearly defined in their own minds; each underrated the other's chances, the one from ignorance of Madame de Maintenon's successful intrigues, the other from a knowledge of the King's embitterment towards his nephew.

The information which was sent to the Regent, coupled with congratulations, seems at the best a very great inconsequence on the part of a house which had clearly shown its determination to stand aloof from the House of Orléans. The injudicious service rendered by the Duc du Maine to his opponent brought no advantage to the giver and was of the utmost importance to him who

received it. The latter had not been popular, except in a small circle of his own; but now he applied himself diligently to the conquest of the great nobles and dignitaries of the realm.

“Very lavish of his promises,” thus Mademoiselle Delaunay judges him, “and considering his word as of no account, he pledged himself to satisfy all demands in the event of his becoming the master. By similar means he won over the Parliament and had recourse to a thousand intrigues in order to get his friends and partisans into power, so that they might be of use to him later on. The President was to all appearances devoted to the House of Maine, and yet little help could be derived from him: he was a great courtier, but a mediocre man, with agreeable manners and pleasing wit, but weak and timid and possessed of all those faults which help a man to please and prevent him from being useful.”

The successes achieved by the Duc d'Orléans caused great perturbation at Sceaux — moreover a sudden aggravation in the King's state plunged the Duc and the Duchesse du Maine into the utmost consternation. They had not yet given up all hope of getting a fuller knowledge of the Royal will, and of persuading the King to take during his lifetime those measures which would ensure his son's power after his death. If the end should come before this had been contrived, they felt that their cause might be lost indeed.



MADAME DE STAAL-DELAUNAY

(From the painting by MIGNARD)

[To face p. 16;]

1881

Madame du Maine forsook at a moment's notice the engrossing pleasures of Sceaux, and hastened to Versailles, in order at least to gain Madame de Maintenon's ear, if she could not gain access to the King. She found a court already disorganised by the approaching events, and a woman in whom all other interests had been swept away by the force of the coming catastrophe. Madame de Maintenon could be of no use at this juncture, and little help could be expected from the Duc du Maine who stood day after day in stupefied despair by his father's bedside. At last the secrets, on the discovery of which so many efforts had been wasted, fell spontaneously from the King's lips a few days before his death.

They were certainly of an astonishing nature ; during the last years of his reign the clever politician had entirely died in Louis XIV., leaving only the feeble old man, harassed by intrigues, who yielded wearily to persuasion and coercion, with an utter disregard of the consequences. The following were the King's testamentary dispositions ; instead of awarding the Regency to the Duc d'Orléans, he had formed a *conseil de régence* the members of which had all been chosen by him, his nephew being only appointed nominal president of the *conseil*. Every question discussed in the council was to be decided solely by a majority of votes. The Duc du Maine, on

the other hand, was apparently overwhelmed with bounties, the guardianship of the young King, the superintendence of his education, the responsibility of his personal safety, and the commandership over the Royal Bodyguard. The King's last will seemed to be an absolute challenge to the maintenance of public order ; on the one hand, slights and no measures to prevent a vengeance, on the other, lavish favours and no power to uphold them.

The Duc du Maine had hoped for one of those compromises, so dear to his heart, by which one may climb the summits, while yet seeming to be treading the lowly plains ; but there was no trace of diplomacy in this last work of the King's hand, and objections, representations were of no avail. The King was weary of complications and turmoil, and nothing could raise him from his state of apathy.

CHAPTER X

RIVALRIES AND CONSPIRACIES

ON the first day of September 1715 King Louis XIV. died, on the second of September Parliament was to assemble in order to consider the question of the Regency—twenty-four hours of mortal suspense for the Duc and the Duchesse du Maine! Would Parliament sanction the Royal will, would it annul it in parts? Alas, the signs by which events are read beforehand were now in favour of the last conjecture, and yet . . . in the excited minds of the Duc and the Duchesse, past scenes rose up to flatter them with vain hopes. They saw once more in imagination, as they had once seen in reality, the lifeless bodies of the Dauphin and of the Dauphine lying on their bed of state, and the Court filing past to render them their last homage. The crowd, massed round the vast hall, looks on in mute grief, but as the Duc d'Orléans approaches the body of the Dauphine, the beloved of all, a threatening murmur rises like an angry sea and the sinister whisper: *empoisonneur, empoisonneur* encompasses him on

all sides. Now the funeral procession winds through the streets of Paris, and an infuriated mob pursues the Duc d'Orléans with threats and insults. In front of the Palais Royal, the Duc's residence, indignation rises so high that "for a moment there were reasons to fear the worst."¹

But since then three years have passed bringing forgetfulness to unstable minds, and even Parliament, which once shared the public feeling, and used its influence to strengthen it, could no more be relied upon. The Duc du Maine wavered between fear and hope; could it be possible that the same Parliament, which three years before had shuddered at the enormity of the crime, would now deliberately elect the alleged criminal to the most responsible post in the State, and entrust to him the frail life of the future King, a child of five? It seemed incredible, and yet, all through the long hours of the day, and the still longer watches of the night, the Duc and the Duchesse feared it in spite of themselves.

A significant demonstration, which had taken place only a few days before the King's death, had revealed in which direction blew the wind of popular favour. The King, having ordered a general review of the troops, and feeling unable to preside at it in person, had granted to the Duc du Maine the very signal honour of representing him. The Duc was cantering proudly at the

¹ Saint-Simon.

head of his battalions, when the Duc d'Orléans appeared upon the scene; then an astonishing manœuvre took place, a manœuvre which seemed entirely unpremeditated, and was all the more impressive for it—with one accord the brilliant escort of the Duc du Maine turned, and followed the Duc d'Orléans. . . .

The second day of September dawned at last and realised the worst previsions of the House of Maine. The King was dead, his wishes were powerless. Parliament ignored them with insulting deliberateness, and appointed the Duc d'Orléans Regent of France. His decrees were, it is true, to be checked by a committee, but it was not probable that the latter would have much weight. The new Regent declared in his own facile way that "he was delighted to feel his hands tied against all evil doing, and free to commit all good deeds . . ." and proceeded to prove it by forcing Parliament to annul the appointment of the Duc de Maine as commander of the Swiss Guard. The safety of the little King being dependent on a sufficient military force to assure it, the Duc de Maine saw himself compelled to give up his guardianship over the King also, and at the end of that fateful day he saw himself reduced to a position which was in reality nothing more than the chief tutorship over a child of five.

The Duc and the Duchesse du Maine took this crushing turn of Fortune's wheel each according

to his or her own peculiar temperament; the Duc with a silent and dogged determination not to yield, the Duchesse with loud recriminations and defiant threats. They agreed on one point only, namely, that the apartments in the Tuileries which belonged by right to those attached to the person of the King, were not to be despised, and they installed themselves there after the little King's return from Vincennes.

A few months passed in relative serenity, and again some semblance of elation seemed to reign in the Duchesse's circle. Now that the disappearance of Madame de Maintenon's sombre draperies had given the signal for a lifting of that pall of sadness which had so long depressed the Court, the Duchesse was not unwilling to have her share of Court life, and to mix a little gaiety with her political strenuousness.

According to Mademoiselle Delaunay every one, herself excepted, had reason to rejoice over their change of residence; she, however, had found at the Tuileries the inevitable *réduit* allotted to her as usual, without a window or a fireplace. But there were compensations—

“I was in Paris,” she says, “where it had always been my wish to live, and my residence, in spite of its many drawbacks, saw plenty of good company. Since I have been in a position to receive my friends more comfortably, I have

not known many to seek me! I was young then, and that is worth more than anything one can acquire, after the loss of that inestimable advantage!"

She seems to have had a very good time indeed, so much so that the old Abbé de Chaulieu, one of her devoted friends, ardent in his admiration in spite of his eighty years and more, thought it his duty to warn her against coquetry.

"I assured him," she remarks, "that my coquetry was only a dire necessity to please, in order to make up for the discomforts of my lodgings. . . . I gave him my word of honour, which I have kept faithfully, that as soon as I should have a window and a fireplace, I should give up my endeavours!"

The old Abbé was a treasure, a rare flower of that theory of Platonic love, held in such honour among the adherents of Descartes's philosophy. He was blind, and his fiery imagination adorned Mademoiselle Delaunay with all the graces and all the charms. "I deserved none of the epithets he bestowed upon me," says the object of his delusions, and she does not hesitate to prove it later on in a portrait which she draws of herself, according to one of the favourite customs of the time.

"Delaunay is of medium height, thin, dried up, and disagreeable. Her character and her mind are

just like her face; there is nothing wrong about them, but they have no charm. Her bad fortune has added to her value, inasmuch as, according to a common prejudice, people who have neither family nor wealth, must also lack cultivation; consequently the little culture she has wins her easy appreciation.

“Delaunay has had an excellent education, and from it she has derived all the good there is in her: principles and a certain elevation of mind, and some fixed rules for her actions—rules which the force of habit has turned into a second nature. Her one folly has always been the wish to be absolutely reasonable, and, just as women imagine they must have a fine figure because they feel the discomfort of tight stays, so she has believed herself very sensible, because her commonsense has ever been a discomfort and a burden to her.

“She has never been able to check the vivacity of her temper, nor even to reduce it to a semblance of moderation; this has often caused her to be disagreeable to her superiors, burdensome to society, and quite unbearable to her subordinates; luckily Fate has not put her in a position to subject many to her vexatious moods.”

Though this portrait was drawn some twenty years later, it may have fitted the original then in a few points, but the good Abbé de Chaulieu would have allowed none of the defects alluded to. As a worthy classical scholar of his period, he compares her to all the goddesses of

mythology, and proclaims himself now bound in chains like Prometheus, now pierced by all the arrows of Cupid's quiver. His letters and poems, irreproachable in style, were marred by one defect; their author, being blind, had to entrust the writing of them to his page boy, who was wholly innocent of the science of orthography, and must have penned strange productions. In spite of the wild flights of his imagination, he must have had plenty of good, sound commonsense, that dear kind-hearted old Abbé; and his practical efforts to cheer Mademoiselle Delaunay's monotonous existence were quite as frequent as his poetical ecstasies.

“The abbé often proposed to add presents to the incense which he offered me,” we read in the *Memoirs*, “and one day, annoyed by the insistence with which he begged me to accept a thousand pistoles, I said to him: ‘Let me advise you, as a proof of my gratitude for your generous offers, not to make similar ones to many women, you might find one who would take you at your word!’ ‘Oh!’ he replied, ‘I know quite well to whom I am addressing these!’ His naïve answer made me laugh. He often exhorted me to adorn myself more, and tried to make me feel ashamed of not being more elegantly dressed. ‘Abbé,’ I used to say to him, ‘*Je me pare de ce qui me manque.*’

“Having no other means to give me pleasure than by his attentions, he increased them unceasingly. He wrote to me every morning, and

came to see me every day, unless I put off his visit. The letters he sent me enquired into my wishes for the day ; and if I preferred his carriage to his society, he sent me the former without demur, and I could dispose of it as I liked."

If Mademoiselle Delaunay's social position had improved since the household had moved to the Tuileries, her duties as first waiting - woman had not become lighter. For some time past anxieties had deprived Madame du Maine of what small inclination to sleep she had ever possessed, and the tales with which one of her women had been wont to read her to sleep now failed in their effect.

With unshaken confidence in the soporific virtues of these masterpieces of inanity, the Duchesse declared that the reader was at fault, not the matter read, and she transferred the office to Mademoiselle Delaunay. The truth was that she longed for the contact of a mind able to share the burdens of her own, and to help her more efficiently than could a mere droning voice to get through the interminable hours of the night.

More or less fantastical fears had agitated her first months at the Tuileries ; but now a black storm was surely though slowly gathering on the horizon, and a very tangible peril was at hand.

So far the Duc du Maine had only lost a power which he had really never possessed, except during

a few brief moments of exultant expectation, but now he was threatened with the loss of the very titles and prerogatives which alone assured his social position. The attack was led by the Duchesse du Maine's own nephew, commonly called Monsieur le Duc. It was he who, in the ensuing quarrel which assumed gigantic proportions, and is known as the war between *les princes légitimes* and *les princes légitimés*, headed the side of the legitimates. A sorry looking leader to represent high lineage, the pure and proud blood of the Royal Family of France! He was a hideous, one-eyed wretch, whose physical repulsiveness was only equalled by his natural malevolence.

His enmity against the house of Maine had begun long before, on the occasion of a law-suit regarding the will and property of the late Monsieur le Prince, the father of the Duchesse du Maine. Monsieur le Duc had been on the losing side, and had sworn vengeance against the winners. While waiting for a big opportunity, he had not missed any chance for petty persecutions, refusing, for instance, to sign deeds in which Monsieur du Maine was taking his legal rank of prince of the royal blood, and affecting on all occasions to deny the dignities conferred upon him by the King.

Among the multitudinous promises given by the Duc d'Orléans, before his accession to the Regency, was a formal one made to Monsieur

le Duc, to annul the royal decrees, w^hch gave the *princes légitimés* their rank and their prerogatives; he had, however, found this promise as difficult to keep as most of the others.

He realised how fatal it would be to foment further dissensions in a State already divided against itself. Moreover his own wife, the Duchesse d'Orléans, was a sister of the Duc du Maine, and however little respect he had shown her, he was loth to raise the cry which would again draw public attention to the stain on his own escutcheon. So he dallied in his own true way, and strove to keep in with both parties; fearing the anger of Monsieur le Duc and his partisans, he refused to the Comte d'Eu, second son of the Duc du Maine, the privilege by which, as a prince of the royal blood, he was entitled to a seat in Parliament on the completion of his fifteenth year, but he also declined to take active steps in the cause of the legitimate princes.

Monsieur le Duc was not a man to waste his anger in fruitless waiting, and with the Prince de Conti and the Comte de Charolais, he drew up against the *légitimés* a petition which he addressed straight to the King. The party attacked retaliated by means of another petition, which demanded that the question at issue should be adjourned to the time of the King's majority.

THE Regent, pressed hard on all sides, shifted his responsibility as far as was possible, by electing a committee which was to decide the claims of both parties. Thereupon Paris witnessed the development of one of the most interminable law procedures that has ever excited public curiosity, racked the brains of lawyers, and scattered abroad the dust of thousands of ancient documents. On either side accusation was piled upon accusation, refutation pitted against refutation, plea against plea, precedent against precedent.

The Duchesse du Maine was one of the most passionate amongst the combatants; she had never doubted her easy supremacy in all things, and when, through the stress of circumstances, she was forced to attack the involved questions of the law, she felt persuaded that she would find the conclusive documents and arguments which would ensure a brilliant victory to her side. Meanwhile the whole intellectual coterie of Sceaux was pressed into the service of the great science of chicanery—no more sonnets or odes, no more delightful readings of the *Anti-Lucrèce*. Monsieur de Malezieu was forced into the paths where an oracle can be most oracular, though he secretly despised his new chances, and even Monsieur de Polignac was bidden to forego the delights of æsthetic discussions.

Only the Duc du Maine was excluded from the common interest; the Duchesse had lost her faith in his efficiency as a diplomat; silence was the watch-word in his presence, and he was greeted by a mysterious hush whenever he presumed to enter his wife's apartments.

As a token of her rising favour, Mademoiselle Delaunay was admitted into the conspiracy; but, alas, her turn came at night when hour after hour she had to sit by the Duchesse's bedside.

"The greatest part of the night," she says, "was spent in laborious researches. The enormous volumes piled upon the bed like so many mountains crushing her made Madame du Maine seem a veritable Encelas buried under Mount Etna! I helped her with her work, turned over endless old chronicles, ancient and modern books of law, until at last the excess of fatigue drove the Princess to think of taking some rest. Then I had to read her to sleep, and after that only I was free to seek in my turn sleep which very often would not come."

Mademoiselle Delaunay's task became more arduous still, when the rumour of Madame du Maine's researches began to spread through Paris and to attract all those needy adventurers or would-be savants, who are ever on the lookout for a chance to make their problematic fortune.

As Madame du Maine had no time to test

their abilities, the task devolved upon her first waiting - woman who, to judge from her descriptions, was often sorely puzzled by her interlocutors.

“Hundreds of obscure people came to offer their help and to bring their meagre discoveries; most of them were sent to me, or at least advised to come to me. One appeared, among others, who was renowned for his great learning; but he was more of a Hebrew than a Frenchman, and more conversant with the customs of the Chaldeans than with those of this country. He knew no court except that of Semiramis, and yet he asked to come to ours with his ancient lore which could be of little use for our present affair; precedents taken from the family of Nimrod were not likely to be conclusive in the case of Louis XIV.’s family! A day was, however, fixed for an interview with him, and he was referred to me. When he arrived I was assisting at Madame du Maine’s toilet, and somebody came to call me. She said to me: ‘Don’t go, let him come in here; I will see him.’ He came into her room, persuaded that he was being taken to one of her waiting-women. The sumptuous apartment, the paraphernalia of the toilet, the number of people in waiting, did not dispel his first idea. He called the Duchesse, ‘Mademoiselle’ all through his conversation with her, and went away without having a suspicion that he had been speaking to anybody but me.”

Strange dinner and supper parties were among the unexpected consequences of the Duchesses legal activity. Most of those improvised oracles and Pythonesses who came to offer their wisdom were more or less famished individuals, who vowed with charming naïveté that their advice was always superior during or after a meal. One or two picturesque pages in the *Memoirs* are devoted to these feasts.

“This traffic of erudition put me into relation with all kinds of people. One of the most tenacious of them was a certain Abbé Lecamus, introduced by a sham countess who was in reality nothing but a beggar. They both played a part in our great comedy, though their platitude made them quite unworthy to appear in it. Among our would-be oracles there was also a former monk whom the countess introduced to us, armed with his writings. She had persuaded him that, in order to see them truly appreciated, he must offer me a supper at his house. It could not be avoided. I went to it accompanied by our famished countess who was beside herself at the prospect of a meal. I found in the house a company which looked more as if it belonged to the world of shades than to this. On the face of the master of the house, who was rich but extremely miserly, one could read quite plainly his regret at having to feed us at all. My annoyance was as great as his, and from utter boredom, or for want of something better to do, I seized a pair of tongs and began

to poke the fire which was rather low. I got hold of something which my treacherous sight made me take for a charred log which had got displaced, and which I pushed back. Alas! it proved to be a very black chocolate pot, full of chocolate! It had not occurred to me to imagine such an addition to the feast, and it was indeed as much out of place as my imaginary log. The liquid was upset, extinguishing the fire and the mirth of the guests, and throwing our host into the utmost consternation. To comfort him, I suggested that one could very well do without chocolate after a supper, and I am convinced that he never brewed any again, in order to be sure of not meeting henceforth with such a sad accident.

“I went with the countess and the Abbé to another party, still more eccentric. They showed me another *intriguante* in possession, as they said, of the most important secrets. She was a friend of a certain Abbé de Lérac, who had written either for or against Monsieur le Duc, and could throw great light upon our subject. Madame la Duchesse du Maine, like those patients who are not satisfied with clever doctors, but must resort to quacks also, listened to whatever advice came, and then sent me out on voyages of discovery. All the knowledge that I gained from Dame Dupuis, as she was called, was an absolute conviction of her total uselessness. However, our people insisted, and vowed that after a meal she would speak like Pythia on her tripod: all their intrigues evidently tended only towards securing some good morsels. I was driven to sitting down to supper

with that band of brigands. They took me to a kind of tumbled down barn, where the feast was to take place. We winded in and out of dark passages, and crossed floors worn to a thin transparency ; these weird haunts made me expect terrifying things. I did not know whether I was being taken to a witches' sabbath, whether I should find myself among cut-throats, or something even worse. The assembly, when I found it at last, did not look re-assuring ; it seemed made up of people well fitted for uncouth mysteries, the songs which cheered the feast were in harmony with the rest, and the wine which Dame Dupuis drank freely during the meal did not lure out of her any of her profound secrets. She reappeared later on with her ambiguous speeches, upon which no light could be thrown. She may have been a spy, but whatever she was, our dealings with her led to nothing, and I only mention her because her name appears in the authentic documents of our great law procedure."

Alas for the fruitless interviews, the wasted feasts, the sleepless nights ! The case of the *légitimés* was judged and lost. In July 1717 Parliament revoked the royal edict which had granted to the *princes légitimés* the right to succeed to the throne, and divested them of their title of princes of the blood.

This catastrophe plunged Madame du Maine into the utmost despair. She began by overwhelming with reproaches that ever-patient

scapegoat, her husband, and then proceeded to reflect over means of retaliation. Before very long her over-wrought imagination was filled with visions of the battles of an avenging war.

The first Memoirs about the Fronde were just then being published, and the Duchesse du Maine had no difficulty in imagining herself a second Mademoiselle de Montpensier, riding into besieged cities at the head of a victorious army and pointing formidable guns at the very windows of the arch-enemy, the Duc d'Orléans. The main body of those victorious troops should be Spanish; it was to Spain that she awarded in her mind the glory of playing, after her, an honourable second in the heroic *epos*! So far her demands upon Felipe V. had been of a more modest nature; she had only asked his support in favour of her party's request that the States General should be assembled, in order to revise the last decisions taken by Parliament. That petition was already on its way to Spain, and had been entrusted to a Jesuit.

Up to that point, the Duchesse's actions had been remarkable for their unwonted moderation, but when rumours reached her of an intrigue with Spain in which she might join, it was not in her power to resist. All round her, events were beginning to show that the camp of the *légitimés* was not the only one in which the

Regent was anathematised ; unfulfilled promises, violated oaths were raising on all sides anger and rebellion. Madame du Maine would have liked to have made common cause with all the discontented ; it was regrettable that chance led her to league herself with two of the most witless—the Comte de Laval and the Marquis de Pompadour. The former, whose mind was not over-fertile in ideas, was further hindered in the enunciation of the few he had by having to wear a kind of sinister looking muzzle to hold up his jaw which had been smashed during the wars. The second of the conspirators was not only a fool, but a coward to boot, and he was to bear himself with pitiable weakness in the hour of peril. The two were nevertheless received with open arms, and under their distinguished patronage, Madame du Maine entered into negotiations with the Spanish ambassador, the famous Prince of Cellamare.

The Spanish Embassy was already under observation and specially marked out by the Regent's spies, but this only added to the Duchesse's delight at embarking in perilous enterprises. She arranged thrilling interviews in the dead of the night, and in out of the way places, to which the Comte de Laval, disguised as a coachman, had the privilege of driving the Spanish ambassador, mysterious meetings under one of the Seine bridges in Paris, in which Mademoiselle

Delaunay very unwillingly played a prominent part.

Many were the confabulations and many the writings. The Duchesse had laid in a good store of *encre sympathique*; she used it in profusion, and it afforded her as much pleasure in itself as the drawing up of her political manifestoes. She had composed one in particular, destined to point out to the Spanish Government the inadvisability of approving a treatise of the Quadruple Alliance, which was too favourable to the Regent. We must believe if we accept Mademoiselle Delaunay's authority, that it was an excellent production, and Cellamare got it safely into the hands of his sovereign. Another composition, alas, had a less enviable fate. It owed its origin and ill-starred career to the following circumstances. The Spanish ambassador, who does not seem to have had a high opinion of his own or of his country's epistolary talent, asked Madame du Maine to draw up a model of two letters supposed to have been sent by his Government, one addressed to the King, the other to Parliament on the subject of the convocation of the States General.

Madame du Maine entrusted this task to the two strongest minds among her conspirators, Monsieur de Malezieu and the Cardinal de Polignac. They produced a masterpiece, as was

to be expected; but, alas, the fact that Monsieur de Polignac was a Cardinal as well as a conspirator proved fatal to the cause. As he was putting the last stroke of his pen to the copy of the letter, the bells for the King's mass began to ring. The Cardinal, who "always acquitted himself in the most seemly manner"¹ of his duties as Grand Aumonier, hurried away, leaving to Monsieur de Malezieu the care of destroying the rough copy of the document.

The oracle of Sceaux was likely to be skilled in this peculiar occupation, as Messieurs de Laval and De Pompadour were wont to cover an inconceivable amount of paper with the ramblings of their incoherent minds, and upon him devolved generally the task of destroying these divagations, as soon as the authors' backs were turned. On that fatal day, however, whether from negligence or from a certain pride in his joint authorship of the document, Monsieur de Malezieu did not at once destroy the tell-tale paper, and when he wished to burn it, it was nowhere to be found. He spent several days in fruitless search; the missing paper remained undiscovered, and did not reappear until the ill-fated day when all those concerned with its contents were praying most devoutly for its eternal disappearance.

¹ D'Argenson, "Mémoires."

CHAPTER XI

HUMILIATION OF THE HOUSE OF MAINE

WHILE the Duchesse du Maine was relishing to the utmost the mystery and secrecy of her political dealings, the Regent was being informed of all the movements of the conspirators. He feared them but little, these dangerous enemies of the State, but he was determined to expose their proceedings as a justification for the final overthrow of the House of Maine. He had at last decided to enter into an alliance with George I. of England—an alliance strongly advocated by Lord Stair and Cardinal Dubois. If difficulties were to arise in connection with the succession, England's help against Spain would be invaluable; and the question of the English alliance was put before Parliament. The Duc du Maine, clearly seeing the drift of the question, and carried away by his passion, swerved for once from the path of prudence, and violently opposed the alliance, whereupon the Regent was heard to exclaim on leaving the Assembly: "Monsieur du Maine has taken off his

mask at last!" Whilst deliberating on the possibilities opened up by such an unprecedented piece of imprudence, the Duc d'Orléans was by degrees raising the strongest advocates of his policy to the most prominent offices of the State, and all those in office who were suspected of even the slightest connection with the opposition were discharged one after the other. Monsieur le Président de Mesmes was soon obliged secretly to warn Madame du Maine that one of her staunchest friends, Monsieur de Noailles, the minister of finance, was to be deprived of his office in favour of a fanatical adherent of the Regent's policy, the Marquis d'Argenson.

At Sceaux warnings began to pour in from all sides; it was evident that the Duc d'Orléans had vowed to bring about the complete humiliation of the House of Maine, and alleging the fact that the court of Sceaux entertained treacherous relations with Spain, he proposed to deprive the Duc du Maine of his last office at Court, the direction of the King's education. This was a bold move in the game of a man accused of having poisoned both the father and the mother of the child over whom he now claimed complete control—and at a time when suspicion still rankled in many minds and ostentatiously expressed itself in the most insulting precautionary measures. The old Maréchal de Villeroi, for instance, the King's governor, kept the

bread and the linen under lock and key, and affected special precautions in reference to the King's wine, at which action, as Duclos says in his Memoirs, "fools marvelled, and ill-intentioned people applauded!"

Notwithstanding all this, the Regent dared to propose to the Council for the Regency the change which he was contemplating, and one voice only was raised in protest. The Duc and the Duchesse du Maine were warned of the blow which threatened them, and lived for some time in dreaded anticipation of it; as the days passed, however, and brought no catastrophe, Madame du Maine's elastic nature rebounded into optimism, and on the eve of the 26th August, in honour of Saint Louis, her patron saint, she gave a brilliant reception at the Arsenal. The very next morning was to witness the crash.

The Duchesse was sleeping peacefully, after the gaieties of the night, when a messenger arrived post-haste from the Duc, who had returned to the Tuileries a few hours before. Even while she hastily prepared to obey the imperative message which called her back, Parliament was being summoned to the Tuileries, where the King was to hold a *lit de justice*. The news had burst upon the Duc in the early morning, when one of the gentlemen of his household had waked him with the intimation that something unusual was taking place in the palace; a sound of hammering was distinctly audible above the Duc's

apartment, and the explanation of this untimely disturbance — it was then five o'clock in the morning — was not long forthcoming: a small army of workmen were getting ready the Throne Room.

Monsieur du Maine dressed with feverish haste and went up to the King's apartment, where the Regent soon joined him, and said to him with triumphant malice: "I know that since the last edict passed by Parliament, you have not cared for public assemblies; the King is to hold a *lit de justice* to-day, your absence will be excused." "I shall dispense with this ceremony all the more willingly, as the *lit de justice* will not concern us," replied the Duc du Maine. "Perhaps," retorted the Regent, and left him to ponder on that fateful word.

The *lit de justice* was opened; in helpless consternation and abject fear the Duc du Maine wandered about the Tuileries, not daring to face the assembly which was despoiling him of his last honours. It was in this piteous state that the Duchesse found him and strove in vain to terrorise him into action; even then the wrath of his dreaded tyrant could not make him cross the threshold of the *salle du trône*. In the stress of her anxiety to know something, at least, of that which the "contemptible coward," who was the head of the House of Maine, refused to hear, the Duchesse bade some pages

climb up the balconies and spy through the windows of the assembly hall. Clutching at whatever support was available, and straining their eyes and ears, they were able to catch some scraps at least of the momentous events which were taking place, and threw them to their masters below. It was in this ignominious manner that the Duc and the Duchesse du Maine first learned the decrees of the 29th August 1718.

Never, perhaps, did a king of France hold a more dramatic *lit de justice* than did the little boy king of eight, around whose childish unconsciousness passions surged so high on that memorable day. "The expression and the countenance of those who were present," says the Duc de Saint-Simon in his Memoirs, "beggar description."

At last the momentous question of the relative rights of the *légitimes* and the *légitimés* was to be finally decided, and the former, on whose side were ranged the dukes and peers, knew that their hour of triumph had come. Many of those present could hardly refrain from giving vent to their feelings of exultation.

"It was well known," says Saint-Simon, "with what ardour I had defended the cause of the Peers against the privileges of the *légitimés*. I therefore imparted to my countenance an additional expression of gravity and modesty, and, slowly getting my eyes under proper

control, I resolved to look no one in the face. As soon as the Regent had opened his lips, Monsieur le Duc had darted at me a triumphant glance which had all but destroyed my impassibility; it was a warning to me to exaggerate the sobriety of my expression, and to avoid all possibility that our eyes should meet. Thus I remained self-contained, motionless, as if glued to my seat, yet watching with a devouring interest everybody's expression, and in a state of the utmost tension; my whole being was permeated with the most vivid yet delicate sensations of joy, with the most entrancing emotion, with a happiness for which I had longed with boundless yearning. I was sweating with anguish at my efforts to repress the transports of my delight, and with that very anguish mingled a sense of voluptuous enjoyment, such as I never felt either before or after that great day. How truly inferior to the pleasures of the mind are the mere pleasures of the senses!"

In an atmosphere thus fraught with passion the decree which deprived Monsieur du Maine of his last honours was moved without encountering any resistance; a feeble protest raised by Parliament was swept away, and the Duc du Maine's last office at Court was given over to the rival who had been most violent in his persecutions of him, to Monsieur le Duc, nephew of Madame du Maine.

Intimation was, moreover, given to the chief

victim of the day, that his apartments in the Tuileries should be vacated within a few hours. On the evening of that same 27th of August Monsieur le Duc took possession of his new quarters, while his vanquished rivals had to seek refuge in the Hôtel de Toulouse, the property of Monsieur du Maine's younger brother, the Comte de Toulouse.

If anything could add to the bitterness of this sudden blow, it was the invidious distinction which had on that day been made between the two brothers. The indictment against the Duc du Maine had hardly been pronounced, when the Regent had risen and declared before the Assembly that he had "thought it fit to give back, as a favour, that which he had been obliged to take away for the sake of equity, and to make a personal exception in favour of Monsieur le Comte de Toulouse, an exception which would leave him, and him alone, in the possession of all the honours that he had hitherto enjoyed." The Regent added that this favour was granted to the Comte de Toulouse in recognition of "his virtue, his application, his probity, and his disinterestedness."

However luminous the younger brother's virtues may have been, they could hardly have shed any ray of comfort upon the gloom of that terrible night, which the fugitives spent under

his roof. "The horror of this flight," says Mademoiselle Delaunay, "and still more the event which was the cause of it, made an impression upon me, such as I have never experienced on any other occasion. Madame la Duchesse du Maine had sent me to Sceaux to look through all her papers and to burn all that could seem reprehensible. I returned in the evening to the Hôtel de Toulouse, and spent the entire night by the bedside of Madame la Duchesse, whose condition was past description. She was in a state of prostration, which was like an entire absence of life, like a lethargic sleep, from which she only roused herself now and again with sudden, convulsive movements."

A plan of action was imperative, nevertheless, and the next day the Duc and the Duchesse, with their suite, returned to Sceaux. There the same shroud of passive gloom hung heavily over all for several days, only lifted here and there by the stirring of some fear or anxiety among the members of the conspiracy. So many dangers threatened! The letters which the Baron de Walef was sending from Spain might be intercepted at any time, the imprudence of Monsieur de Pompadour and others had to be reckoned with. The most uneasy of all was certainly Monsieur de Malezieu; he now spent more hours and efforts than ever in the quest of the rough

copy of that letter which he had mislaid, oscillating between the certainty that it must be found and the conviction that it had been stolen and delivered into the hands of the Regent.

Two months passed without any further complications, and the conspirators began to breathe freely again; that Madame du Maine's crushed spirits were recovering from the shock which they had sustained, was amply proved by the fact that she now returned to her political intrigues. A certain caution still characterised her actions: she dared not hold personal intercourse with her allies in Paris, but she could not resist the wish to again dip her fingers into the troubled waters of intrigue; she did many foolish things, one of which was to send Mademoiselle Delaunay to Paris to hold a secret confabulation with the Comte de Laval. The messenger had little faith in the efficiency of this ill-advised measure, but, as usual, she refrained from expressing her opinion, and submitted to a three hours' *tête-à-tête* with the Count. She emerged from it in a state of utter mental exhaustion; in the general incoherence of the conversation one point only, it seems, had appealed to them both with equal force, namely the advisability of never pronouncing each other's names! . . .

As Mademoiselle Delaunay was returning to Sceaux, in the dead of the night, according to

strict injunctions, her carriage was overturned and she was hurled into a ditch. "At the time when people believed in omens," she remarks, "this one would not have been despised."

In truth, a destructive fate was rapidly descending upon Sceaux, called down by Madame du Maine's very efforts to ward it off. She brought about the final catastrophe in less than two months. Once roused from her torpor she felt with a goading keenness that the more insults she had to avenge, the more she needed the help of Spain. There was nothing to be done at Sceaux, a solitude more or less shunned by all, and under the pretext that she wanted to chose a new town residence, Madame du Maine returned to Paris.

Her allies were able to prove to her that they had not wasted their time, even while deprived of her inspiring presence. Monsieur de Pompadour had been specially hard at work, a towering pile of writings, manifestoes, letters, declarations, formed an imposing monument, in front of which Madame de Pompadour would stand and sigh despondently: "We have the most decisive and the most useful documents; but nothing can be got through to the Court of Spain!" The opportunity at last presented itself. The Abbé Portocarrero, a young Spaniard known to Madame du Maine, was returning to his country in a travelling

coach which possessed the inestimable advantage of a secret box under the seat. The Abbé was ready to vouch, with the most solemn oaths, for the inviolability of his coach, and although his feeling of security was not shared by all, the occasion seemed too good to be wasted; after some hesitation the precious papers were piled into the secret box, and the Abbé started for Spain.

Meanwhile one of these small causes which produce great effects was taking its momentous share in the development of the drama. There was on the evening of Portocarrero's departure a disappointed woman in the establishment of La Fillon in Paris; a rendezvous which had been arranged was countermanded. There was nothing very unusual about an occurrence of that kind, but the excuse which explained it raised it to the importance of an affair of State. "I cannot come," had written one of the secretaries of the Spanish Embassy, to the woman who expected him, "on account of the enormous number of despatches necessitated by the Abbé Portocarrero's departure for Spain."

The woman thought it advisable to put this excuse before La Fillon, and the latter, perhaps one of the numerous spies employed by the Government, sent the Regent an intimation of what had happened.

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Now Fortune was pleased in this case, as in many others, to follow her caprices and to favour first one side of the game and then the other. It is true that Portocarrero was pursued at once, stopped at Poitiers, and deprived of all his papers in spite of the wonderful structure of his coach ; but once despoiled of his despatches he was released, and the papers which were brought back to the Regent, were stopped by an insurmountable barrier, just before reaching their final destination.

They were stopped at the door of the Regent's private apartments. It was late, and the Duc d'Orléans had just sat down to one of his notorious midnight revels with his *roués*, as he called his friends in debauchery, and a few women of "middling virtue," as Saint-Simon characterises them. The sumptuous table with its shimmering gold plate was awaiting the Lucullan repast ; the jovial company was perhaps lending a hand to the professional cooks, as was its custom, or the witty assembly was holding its usual review of the scandals and the comedies of the Court.

Perhaps the Regent's favourite mistress, Madame de Sabran, "slightly debauched, but not wicked," had just declared, looking at her lover in one of her defiant moods, that "God has made princes and lackeys of the same clay,

carefully separating it from that out of which other men were made." Whatever may have been happening behind the closed doors, the orders were strict, and no one dared go against them.

"From the time of the supper hour," says Saint - Simon, "everything was so strongly barricaded that it was useless to try to gain access to the Regent—even about affairs of the most vital interest to the State or to himself."

On being released, Portocarrero had at once despatched a secret messenger with a warning to the Spanish Embassy, and on that occasion the Regent's dilatory methods of treating business gave the Spanish ambassador a margin of sixteen hours in which to act. Trusting to luck and to the Regent's temperament, he believed he could safely send into Spain the most compromising papers which remained still in his charge. He sent them to a certain Abbé Brigaut, with a hundred louis, and the order to start out at once. The Abbé, by no means a heroical conspirator, took the hundred louis and the papers but only kept the money; he left the papers in Paris, in the charge of a friend, the Chevalier de Ménil, telling him that they were some old family deeds. Then, with a lighter heart, he started on his way.

Of all these events, nothing transpired until the following day. In the afternoon of that 9th

day of December 1718, one of the Duc du Maine's gentlemen - in - waiting rushed into Mademoiselle Delaunay's apartment with the startling news that the Spanish Embassy was under military occupation and the whole neighbourhood under police supervision ; but that the reason of it was not yet known. It was but too well known to most of the inmates of Sceaux, upon whom real torture was inflicted by the comments and suppositions of uninitiated friends who appeared one after the other, full of the same subject. Madame du Maine dared not try to escape from her importunate callers, she bravely masked her anxiety under a feigned indifference, and only stole a few seconds from her social duties to hold a hurried interview with Mademoiselle Delaunay, and beg her to ascertain the real state of affairs.

The details of the total failure of the plot reached Sceaux by degrees ; first the news of the confiscation of Portocarrero's papers, then the intimation that important documents had been seized at the Embassy, and at last the announcement of the arrest of Prince Cellamare and of the imprisonment of the Marquis de Pompadour and the Marquis de Saint Génès. One hope only remained : the Abbé Brigaut was believed to be well beyond reach, with his weighty documents. Mademoiselle Delaunay's Memoirs tell how this

last hope was shattered, two days after the first news had been received.

“Madame la Duchesse du Maine was playing a game of biribi, according to her custom (she was careful not to make any change in her usual round of occupations) when a certain Monsieur de Châtillon, a very morose man, who hardly ever spoke at all, said suddenly: ‘By the way, here is a funny piece of news: in connection with that affair at the Spanish embassy, they have just arrested and sent to the Bastille a certain abbé Bri—— Bri——’ He could not recall the name and none of those who knew it had any wish to help him. At last he found the name and added: ‘The ridiculous part of the business is that he has confessed everything, and there must be now a good many people in a nice state of embarrassment!’ Then he burst out laughing, a thing he had never been known to do before. Madame la Duchesse du Maine, though she felt not the least inclination to join in his merriment, said: ‘Yes, that is indeed very funny.’ ‘It is enough to make one die of laughter,’ rejoined Monsieur de Châtillon. Just think of these people who believed their transaction to be absolutely safe, and here comes a fellow who tells even more than he is asked, and gives the names of all those connected with the affair!’”

It was soon known that the Abbé Brigaut had effected a real *chef-d'œuvre* of blunders; he had disguised himself as a gallant soldier of fortune,

but he had omitted to remove from his pockets some tell-tale letters addressed to "the Abbé Brigaut," and he had hired a broken down old steed which hopelessly belied his character of a dashing cavalier! The ill-assorted pair had ambled along so successfully that they had covered several miles in three days, at the end of which they had been stopped in their triumphant progress by an agent of the Regent, who arrested them at Montargis, a very short distance from Paris. Luckily by the time the Abbé was overtaken, the papers he had left in Paris had been destroyed by his prudent friend.

At the news of the arrest of the Spanish Ambassador, the Chevalier du Ménil, who was very suspicious of the documents confided to him, took it upon himself to violate the secrecy of the Abbé's "family papers." He found, as he had expected, that very few of the documents answered to that description, whereupon he did not hesitate to burn the rest. The conflagration thus produced had hardly subsided, when the Chevalier du Ménil was ordered to appear before Cardinal Dubois, the Regent's minister; cross-examined as to his relations with the Abbé Brigaut, Monsieur du Ménil answered, in strict accordance with the truth, that the Abbé had never spoken to him of this fatal business; never losing his presence of mind, he appeared at last to be



Guillaume Cardinal

de Cambrai Archevêque

Dubois, & N. D. P. 1701

Engraver & Sculptor

GUILLAUME, CARDINAL DUBOIS.

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yielding to the force of much persuasion, and made an "ingenuous confession" to the effect that he did have at his house some papers entrusted to him by the Abbé. The papers were fetched and the light of innocence seemed to shine more and more over the incident when the carefully-constructed plan was ruined by the Abbé himself. On being told that his papers were in the hands of the Regent, he exclaimed: "Then all details must be known, question me no more, for every point of the business was stated in those papers!" Two days later Monsieur du Ménil was in the Bastille.

Each morning brought tidings of a new arrest, and Monsieur and Madame du Maine lived in hourly expectation of a royal warrant against their persons. The measures which the Regent was taking to justify his treatment of the affair pointed to an even more rigorous intervention of the law, in case of future inculpations. Copies of two letters written by Cellamare to the Spanish minister, Cardinal Alberoni, were put into public circulation, and were headed by the following declaration from the Regent:—

"In order that the public may be informed upon what foundation is based the resolution taken by his Majesty the King on the 9th instant, namely, the dismissal of Prince Cellamare, ambassador of the Court of Spain, and the decree that he should be accompanied as far as the Spanish frontier by

one of the gentlemen of his suite, we have commanded to be printed a copy of two letters of the said ambassador to his Eminence, Cardinal Alberoni, written on the first and on the second day of this month, signed by the said ambassador and written throughout in his own hand, without the use of any cipher."

An ominous note of warning ran all through the paragraph which followed the text of the two letters :—

"When the service of the King and the necessary precautions to be taken for the safety of the State will permit the publication of the plans, manifestos, and memoirs quoted in these two letters, then will be brought to light all the circumstances of the detestable conspiracy set afoot by the said ambassador for the purpose of causing a revolution in the kingdom."

From this declaration it was clear that the diverse ramifications of the plot known in history as "Cellamare's conspiracy" would be considered entirely homogeneous with their root, namely, the plan to foster the general discontent then prevalent in France, for the purpose of overthrowing the Regent and strengthening the Spanish influence. Viewed in this light, the dealings of all those implicated would bear the character of high treason and be dealt with accordingly.

For a time it seemed as if Madame du Maine

would prove herself a true grand-daughter of the Grand Condé. Her spirit rose with the approach of danger, and her dauntlessness inspired all those around her. In reality it was her innate sense of the dramatic which was revelling in the proportions of the approaching tragedy. Never had her most ambitious productions on the stage of Sceaux afforded her a leading part of such magnitude! This portentous time of waiting was truly one of those psychological crises worthy of the choice of a Corneille, or a Racine, and there came a night which the Duchesse deemed just the one to figure as the culminating point, as a kind of third act in a classical tragedy!

In the evening a secret warning had been sent by the Marquise de Lambert that the arrest was imminent. Madame du Maine assembled around her all those whom she considered worthy to figure in the great scene; the younger Monsieur de Malezieu was there, endeavouring to find the noble answer to the high-minded tirade of the heroine; the Chevalier de Gavaudun was there with his polished repartees; and Mademoiselle Delaunay, in her usual rôle of the classical *confidente*, listened politely to each one in turn. A few others were there besides, but Monsieur le Duc du Maine was not amongst them. He had acknowledged his inability to hold his own in this dramatic performance, and had retired to

Sceaux, where he was awaiting his fate more or less ingloriously. As a climax, the night was a failure, for it wore on and the day broke and nothing happened. At last the weary actors retired one by one, and no one remained with the exhausted heroine, who had thrown herself on her bed, except her faithful *confidente*, Mademoiselle Delaunay, who now turned to that part of her rôle which was most familiar to her, and took up a book in order to put her mistress to sleep. The book happened to be Machiavelli's "Decades," marked at the chapter called "Conspiracies." She showed it to the Duchesse who exclaimed with a burst of laughter: "For heaven's sake put away this evidence against us as fast as you can, it would be of the most damning nature."

Four or five days went by without bringing any change; Madame du Maine, having a great deal of leisure, and being unable to devote it to anything but the great care of the moment, had undertaken to write a defence of her acts, which she meant to entrust to her mother, Madame la Princesse, and in which she put great confidence. Before she could finish this piece of eloquence, however, she was arrested.

"Madame la Duchesse having spent the greater part of the night writing her apology and talking to me about it, went to sleep about six o'clock and I retired. I was just beginning to doze, when

I heard my door, which was kept on the latch, suddenly open. I thought that Madame la Duchesse was sending for me, and I said half in a dream: 'Who is it?' An unknown voice answered: 'In the service of the King.' Then I understood the position. I was bidden in a rather uncivil manner to get up at once. I obeyed without speaking. It was on the 29th of December and still very dark. The people who had entered my room had come without a light; they went to fetch one, and I could then distinguish an officer of the Guards and two musketeers. The officer read out to me an order which enjoined him to keep a close watch upon me.

"Meanwhile I proceeded to dress and asked for my maid, whose room was some little distance from mine, but they would not allow her to come. The whole house was filled with guards and musketeers, and no one could move about anywhere; she tried several times to force a passage through the soldiers, but was always driven back. I was in a state of horrible anxiety as to what was happening in Madame la Duchesse du Maine's apartments, for I did not doubt that she was being arrested at the same time, and surmised rightly that they would not let me know anything about it. I learned later on that the Duc de Béthune, captain of the guards, accompanied by Monsieur de la Billarderie, lieutenant of the King's body guard, had brought her the King's order for her imprisonment, to which she had submitted without any resistance. La Billarderie

asked the woman who was sleeping in Madame la Duchesse du Maine's room whether she was not the Demoiselle Delaunay. She denied it with great determination, feeling no desire, for the time being, to undergo the treatment destined to me.

"I remained alone with my three guards from seven until eleven o'clock that morning, without knowing anything of what was going on outside my room; I asked one of them with whom I affected to converse light-heartedly if I should not accompany Madame du Maine in the event of her being moved to some other residence. He assured me that she would not be denied anything that she might wish to request. This hope was gratifying, but I did not enjoy it long; another guard came in soon to announce that the Duchesse had gone, and that now I could be left with one musketeer. . . ."

If the Regent's police agents had demurred for a time, they were all the more active on that 29th day of December 1718. The younger Monsieur de Malezieu, the Chevalier de Gavaudun, Mademoiselle de Montauban were arrested with Madame du Maine at her Paris residence, and also two footmen, four grooms, and two chambermaids.

The same fate was at the same time overtaking the Duc du Maine and the elder Monsieur de Malezieu at Sceaux. While the papers were being examined and sifted in their presence, the

King's officer suddenly came upon the long lost copy of the letter which had so far eluded all researches. Monsieur de Malezieu was the first to spy it, as it lay hidden between the folds of his son's marriage contract, and with a violence born of a long-standing grudge, he pounced upon the refractory document and tore it to pieces. The officer seems to have been prepared for such emergencies; without a word of remonstrance he picked up the fragments, and later on they were pieced together into a very conclusive evidence.

As the weary day of the arrest wore on, Madame du Maine's stoicism forsook her. She had never imagined for one instant that the Regent could forget the honours due to her rank and her person; her gloomiest visions of imprisonment had shown her nothing worse than some distant royal residence and a momentary seclusion in the company of a suitable household. When she learned that she was being taken to the fortress of Dijon, her indignation knew no bounds, and the thought that her prison was in Burgundy, the province governed by Monsieur le Duc, her arch-enemy, threw her into a frenzy of despair. If we are to believe the rather spiteful pen of Madame, the Regent's mother, "she nearly choked with rage," and fell tooth and nail upon her escort, among others upon poor La Billarderie, a man who suffered from

deplorable tender-heartedness, and who was deeply affected by the harrowing sight of a great princess' misfortunes.

Mademoiselle Delaunay was left in her room, all day in company with her musketeer, whilst the house was being searched for further evidence.

The police was disappointed, nothing was found over which Madame du Maine's enemies could have rejoiced except, according to Madame, the Regent's mother, some letters from the Cardinal de Polignac, which were evidently not meant for publication. The answers to these were seized among the Cardinal's papers, and Madame triumphantly quotes a passage from one which, she says, makes her "burst into peals of laughter, in spite of her sadness!"

About seven o'clock at night the police had completed its business at Madame du Maine's house, and Mademoiselle Delaunay was invited to get into a coach, guarded by three musketeers.

"I had an idea," she says, "that the drive would not be a long one, and that I was being taken to the Bastille: in fact I soon arrived there. They made me alight at the end of a small bridge, where I was met by the Governor. After having entered the prison, I was kept for a while behind the door, because of the arrival of some of our party, whom I was not allowed to see. I understood nothing of all these ceremonies! When the

prisoners in question had been safely put into their respective niches, the Governor came to fetch me and led me to mine. I had to cross more bridges, when one could hear a clanking of chains which produced anything but an agreeable harmony, and at last I arrived in a big room with four dirty bare walls, all scribbled over by my predecessors. It was so utterly devoid of furniture, that some one had to go and fetch me a stool to sit on, two stones were brought in to support a lighted fagot, and a small end of a candle was fastened neatly into the wall to give me some light. All these luxuries having been provided for me, the Governor retired, and I heard the grating of five or six heavy keys, and of quite double that amount of bolts."

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST YEARS OF THE REGENCY

THE licence and disorder which characterised the first years after Louis XIV.'s death were a direct challenge to conspirators. The Regent, who had won his power by an act of intimidation, only kept it by virtue of the disunion existing among rival factions. It was therefore his interest to foment dissensions and to let conspiracies thrive for a time. They thrived apace, each based more or less on the probable death of the little King. Philip V. of Spain, in spite of renunciation acts, was ready to forsake his kingdom at any time, in order to seize the crown of France; he would also willingly have snatched at the slightest chance to wrest the Regency from the Duc d'Orléans, and had already made all necessary plans for establishing a vicarious government in Spain during his absence. The Condés, hereditary rivals of the House of Orléans, upheld this plan secretly.

The Duc du Maine went on dreaming his

ambitious dreams, and devoted a considerable amount of his colossal fortune to the buying of influential members in Parliament. If the choice had to lie between Philip V. and the Duc d'Orléans, he would, of course, uphold the former, but he would have preferred to use Spain for his own ends, and he was scheming accordingly. England, who, since the death of the Austrian emperor in 1711, had feared Austrian pretensions to the throne of Spain far more than French usurpations, was seeking an alliance with the Regent. Lord Stair, British ambassador to the Court of France, was endeavouring to persuade the Duc d'Orléans that in the event of his ascending the throne, his position would be very similar to that of George I., usurper of the Stuart rights, and on that basis he advised an alliance.

The Regent's natural nonchalance prevented him from deciding upon any definite course. He had "all the gifts except that of making use of them," as his skrewd mother had once said of him, and now he was letting things go, and allowing the direction of affairs to slip more and more into the hands of a low intriguer who had the soul of a flunkey and the manners of a bully. The Abbé Dubois, former tutor of the Duc d'Orléans and his future prime minister, was beginning to cast his sinister shadow over the affairs of France. His tyranny, however, was not felt

yet; neither was the Regent's authority, and Duclos aptly expresses the situation when he says that "all felt that they could regulate their rights according to their pretensions." Not the least among these was the Duchesse de Berry, the Regent's daughter, a reckless, impetuous creature whom he idolised. She had trembled before the King—"elle avait rampé devant Mademoiselle de Maintenon," as some Memoirs of the time express it—but now she had her revenge, and broke loose from all restraint.

The extravagance of her caprices kept Paris in a perpetual state of surprise and indignation. Now she demanded a special bodyguard, and, accompanied by it, she paraded the streets of Paris heralded by the sound of trumpets; now she had a royal canopy erected over her seat at the Opera, or at the Théâtre Français she placed four members of her bodyguard upon the stage, and four in the parterre.

At the hue and cry raised by each of these experiments in royal display, the Regent's authority had to intervene and forbid, but his was only a half-hearted repression. He had a passionate admiration for his daughter's daring and inexhaustible vitality; she was the only woman who could keep abreast of him in his breathless race for pleasures, and he associated her more and more with his revels. So notorious were these that even to the

Court of those days, the situation seemed indefensible, and ugly whispers, suggesting the worst, began to be heard. The Regent did not hear them, however, or if he did, he did not heed.

A new fever had seized Paris; the country had stood at the edge of an abyss—national bankruptcy, but had been saved as by a miracle. Law had arrived upon the scene with his “system”; his scheme of salvation had been adopted, and Law’s system of paper money was now in full swing. The gambling fever was upon all; it was spreading like a devastating fire, and within its grasp measures of prudence were as blades of grass in the whirl of a tempest. Fortunes were made and lost in one day. Even then, though but few suspected it, one third at least of the paper money in circulation was utterly worthless, yet the issue of notes continued, and no one who was responsible for this cared or dared to think of the crash which must inevitably follow.

The Regent cared least of all; for years past he had squandered his strength with reckless dissipation, now his excesses were beginning to tell at last; his vitality was drained to its lowest ebb. After one of his nightly revels, he would often sink into a torpor which hung like a dense fog between him and necessary resolutions. He would then yield without any volition of his own to any

pressure put upon him. He granted favours to friends and enemies alike, so that his bounties soon sank as low in value as any of Law's paper money; and in the presence of such weakness, people began to regret the violation of the late King's will.

It was a favourable time for an attempt at overthrowing the Government; the Duc and Duchesse du Maine had chosen their hour well, and but for the fact that Madame du Maine was decidedly not a politician, the whole fate of France might have been turned in that very year 1718.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE BASTILLE

MADemoiselle DELAUNAY's imprisonment was to last eighteen months, and it was merciful that the luxury of knowing that beforehand could not be added to those other "comforts" which marked her first hour in the Bastille. In spite of a state of despondency which was natural enough, she soon discovered that solitude has some inherent advantages. "I found more liberty than I had left behind me," she says. "It is true that in a prison one cannot please oneself, but on the other hand one need not please any one else." On the whole her lot was very bearable, and hardly in keeping with the traditional ideas about the horrors of the Bastille. She had crossed its threshold with the natural fears inspired by the gruesome tales she had heard about it; with a sickening terror she had listened for hours to an awful grinding sound which rose from some unknown regions just below her room, and which she attributed to the working of some instrument of torture. She was steeling herself to encounter

this nerve-racking horror, when, through a chance remark of her gaoler, she discovered that it was nothing more formidable than the turning of the spit in the kitchen below.

Quite tolerable meals were sent up from that homely quarter of the prison; they were served in a room which now seemed palatial, after the addition of a bed, an armchair, two chairs, a table, and a jug and basin. Mademoiselle Delaunay was not alone, she had been allowed to take her maid, the "faithful Rondel," with her. They played cards together, or while the mistress feasted on some odd volumes of "*Cléopâtre*," the only literature provided for her, the maid amused herself by holding a washing day in the hand basin. Nor were these their only pastimes; the two women obtained from the authorities the permission to keep a cat, to frighten away the mice and rats, and after having been obliged much against their will to witness the antics of the mice, they could one day amuse themselves with looking on at the gambols of a family of kittens!

After a while Mademoiselle Delaunay was allowed the use of paper and ink; the sheets of paper were carefully counted, and, as they had to be handed back to the Governor, the choice of subjects she could treat was limited; but that did not discourage the author, and she edified herself and the Governor with "*Moral*



PHILIPPE, DUC D'ORLÉANS,

REGENT: 1715-1723

Considerations on the Book of Ecclesiastes !” Her friends outside had shown that they did not forget her, and this may have helped her to dwell with equanimity on the discouraging pessimism of King Solomon. A few weeks after her incarceration the Governor entered her room, holding in his hand a purse full of gold, and followed by a man who was carrying a bulky bundle. The bundle contained the prisoner’s clothes sent by Monsieur de Valincourt ; the purse was one which she had once worked for that faithful friend and which he was now returning well filled. The generous giver did not stop at that ; he obtained from the Ministers the permission to send in every week, a large open sheet, one side of which was filled with enquiries as to all possible wants of the prisoner ; on the opposite side, the Governor wrote down the “yes” or “no” which Mademoiselle Delaunay answered in his presence to each point of interrogation.

For some time neither mistress nor maid could discover which of the Sceaux conspirators had been brought to the Bastille after them, although Rondel, the only one of the two who possessed “a pair of eyes useful for distances,” was very vigilant at her post of observation, a tiny grated window high up in the wall and looking over the entrance court. From there she gave her mistress a detailed report of all newcomers. At last one day

Mademoiselle Delaunay recognised from her maid's description the strange couple with whom she had been "bidden to still stranger feasts." The Abbé Lecamus and his famished countess had had the honour of being arrested for their "political offences," and were no doubt reckoning with a fair degree of satisfaction the number of days during which they might hope to satisfy their hunger at the expense of the Government.

The Marquis de Pompadour was seen to arrive soon after, with the escort due to his rank, and was safely put behind lock and key; but there was no sign yet of the Comte de Laval. At last, Rondel exclaimed one morning: "Here is the man with the muzzle." The prisoners' list of the "Spanish conspirators" was now complete, and contained even some "supernumeraries"; men who had had no direct connection either with Sceaux or Cellamare, but who were accused of private dealings with Spain. Among them was the Duc de Richelieu, who was gaily adding to the number of his *séances* at the Bastille, the first of which, when he was barely eighteen, had won him much admiration from his contemporaries. There were others imprisoned, less gay than he, amongst them a certain Marquis de Bourdon, an old country squire, plunged in a state of stupor from which he seemed unable to emerge. A letter signed by him, full of the most ardent protestations of loyalty and of the

most generous offers of help had been found among the Duc du Maine's papers. He was arrested, brought to Paris, and cross-examined; his judges enquired how he had conceived this strong attachment for the Duc du Maine. "I do not know him," he replied; "I have never seen him, or His Royal Highness either." "Why, then," proceeded the enquiry, "did you devote yourself entirely to the interests of this Prince, to the prejudice of those of the Regent." "Just as one takes sides for one player, rather than for another, without knowing why," was the reply, and no further explanation could ever be extracted from this unfortunate sportsman.

The cross-examination of the prisoners had been entrusted to Messieurs d'Argenson and Leblanc. The famous Keeper of the Seals found it very difficult on this occasion to uphold his reputation for irresistible eloquence and infallible discrimination. Except for the Abbé Brigaut, who gave all the details asked of him and a great many more in addition, and who was disconcerting through his very loquacity, all the prisoners preserved a dogged silence or succeeded in giving a most aggravating air of candour to their declarations of innocence.

Many times the judges had to return to the Bastille, and, by means of Rondel's eyes, Mademoiselle Delaunay watched them as they crossed the entrance court. They were sometimes

accompanied by the notorious Abbé Dubois, and then "one might have fancied indeed that one was looking at Minos, Æacus, and Rhadamanthus!" she exclaims. The two women who had, after the manner of most prisoners, developed to its utmost the detective instinct which gives a meaning to the smallest trifle, always knew of the judges' arrival beforehand, by the smoke which filtered through the floor and which betrayed the fact that the fire was being lighted in the great hall, which served for the cross-examination. The Abbé Dubois, though all-powerful at Court, was not admitted into the judgment room; his reputation for being "a madman who attacked everybody," his propensity for hurling people down stairs before they had had time to speak, made it probable that his presence would be a hindrance in the path of justice. During the legal proceedings he was often seen pacing up and down the inner courts of the Bastille, his thin, pointed foxy face distorted by impotent rage at the lengthiness of the sittings, and his halting voice, hoarse from continual swearing, raised to the highest pitch of violent altercation, as he attacked the Governor of the Bastille on the subject of the prisoners' insubordination.

Whenever a legal interview was taking place Mademoiselle Delaunay lay with her ear glued to the floor, straining every nerve to catch at the

meaning of what was going on below. She knew who was being cross-examined, as the prisoners could be seen walking across the court which led to the judgment room, and although no distinct words reached her, she could guess the character of the interview, as the voices rose or sank. Among all those who appeared before the judges, the best equipped for resistance, the best qualified by experience and lightheartedness, was the Duc de Richelieu. After seeing all their best methods fail, d'Argenson and Leblanc tried to defeat him with his own arms, and confronted him with forged letters supposed to come from a princess who was not insensible to his passion. Even that was of no avail; but love, which had not succeeded in causing him to make a political slip, was strong enough to procure him his liberty, after a comparatively short time. The name of the person at whose bidding his prison door opened was whispered abroad, and it was not the name of the Regent.

The Abbé Brigaut was a more satisfactory subject for examination; every day he would find new reasons for unburdening his soul, and then justify this Christian duty to himself in edifying letters addressed to the relatives of those he had accused. The Marquis de Pompadour, on the other hand, preserved an unexpected silence, and he might perhaps have proved a hero after all had not his colleague, the Comte de Laval, been arrested at

last. The judges, working on the probabilities suggested by the close partnership of the two men, carried to one declarations supposed to have come from the other, and by this stratagem brought about the defection of the poor Marquis. It was then that he made what he called his "ingenuous" confession. He talked fast and long, and in his anxiety to omit nothing of what he knew, he mentioned among other things the fact that "Madame du Maine interrupted any political discussion as soon as the Duc du Maine appeared." This detail did not seem to gratify the judges, who called his attention to the fact that he had not been asked to write an apology of the Duc du Maine; in short, these equitable men begged him to retract his injudicious remark! He complied with alacrity; there was nothing forthwith that he could refuse to those in power over him, and so it was only just that he should be rewarded, in due time, with a sum of 40,000 livres, which he pocketed most readily.

Monsieur de Laval stood firmly by his oath "not to mention any one's name," but, his friend having quoted all those which it was possible to quote, his steadfastness was a useless sacrifice. His spirit remained firm nevertheless; and to keep the flesh from weakness he demanded that he should have medical attention at least twice a day. The chemist's bills for the Bastille

lengthened considerably under his patronage, and the Regent, who entered into every detail which concerned the prisoners, was one day perusing these bills with the Abbé Dubois. The latter remonstrated at the frequency of some of the remedies administered, but the Duc d'Orléans said, with a humorous smile: "Abbé, as these are the only pleasures they have, do not let us curtail them."

Among the many checks experienced by Messieurs d'Argenson and Leblanc, none were more aggravating than those which resulted from Mademoiselle Delaunay's method of answering. Agility was the very essence of her mind. She knew how to elude a question, while seeming to answer it in the most straightforward manner, and she was not burdened by the conscientious scruples of an Abbé Brigaut; on the contrary, she was convinced that "the paths of deceit are always allowed to those who are deprived of the natural rights of society." She knew that it is always possible so to divide light and shade that those features become salient which one wishes to stand out, and it cost her no struggle to decide at the beginning of each interview that she would "only tell what she chose." Moreover, she was saved from any harrowing grief over the fate of the House of Maine by the conviction that "Princes always manage to get out of their

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difficulties." Three weeks elapsed before her first interrogatory took place. She had had plenty of time to prepare herself, and declares that she might have filled a volume with the answers thought out beforehand. None served her, it seems ; the simplicity of the first questions baffled her, and she says with one of her favourite authors : "J'avais réponse à tout, hormis à qui va là !"

A later interview with her judges afforded her more scope for the practice of her theories. On that occasion the aggravating serenity of the prisoner decoyed the lawyer into a quite unprofessional fit of temper. "You know the whole business," he exclaimed, "and we are determined that you shall speak, or else you will remain in the Bastille for life." "Sir," said Mademoiselle Delaunay, "this might certainly be a provision worth considering for a spinster like me."

CHAPTER XIV

LOVE AND TREACHERY WITHIN PRISON WALLS

AN indefinite stay in the Bastille would, in truth, not have seemed a deplorable fate to Mademoiselle Delaunay. Her material comforts had increased from month to month; to keep up her health and her spirits there were walks in the courts and on the ramparts of the prison, there were cheerful dinners followed by sociable "coffee" in the Governor's apartments, or in the room of one or the other of the prisoners. News from the outside world began also by degrees to filter through the prison walls, and were all the more valued because of their scarcity; they were collected carefully, "shared equally, like the booty of brigands, and feasted upon in the common den." After the first winter Mademoiselle Delaunay's room had been done up and furnished by the business agents of Monsieur du Maine. It looked very habitable, and its occupier specially appreciated the unaccustomed luxury of a mantel-piece where she could "put down a book or a snuff-box." The

room was so attractive that it had soon become the favourite meeting-place of the community, to the secret annoyance of its mistress, who was gradually succumbing to an enchanting dream of happiness, in which one person only did not seem an intruder.

The Chevalier du Ménil, handsome, generous, noble-minded to all appearance, loved her, or at least seemed to love her, and she believed in his whole-heartedness, and was supremely happy in her love for him. Monsieur de Maisonrouge, a blunt, rough soldier in appearance, and a high-minded, unselfish friend in reality, loved her also, and though she did not love him, she made use of him to increase her happiness, for he was the officer in charge, and ever ready to grant her slightest wishes, if it were in his power.

Monsieur de Maisonrouge, having his own simple conception of the feminine species, had first offered a stout resistance to the Governor's suggestion that he should go and see Mademoiselle Delaunay and Mademoiselle de Montauban, the only two women of note whom the Sceaux conspiracy had brought to the Bastille. "What would you have me say to these *pérouelles*," he had objected, "who will do nothing but scream and weep?" He was assured that they were not at all as desperate as he imagined, and he reluctantly went to see them. The bear was

tamed; he left Mademoiselle Delaunay's room completely subjugated, and from that day onwards he paid her most gallant attentions, striving manfully to keep up with what he felt to be her very dazzling conversation—except on the occasions when she happened to speak on the side of his deaf ear—for he had been much too shy to confess to her this infirmity! Through his efforts, all kinds of little favours were given to Mademoiselle Delaunay; she felt his devotion surrounding her on all sides.

“He is the only man,” she says of him, “by whom I have felt that I was truly loved, although it has happened to me, as it does to all women, to find several men who have shown me love. This one said nothing about his feelings, and I think I knew of them long before he did. He was so preoccupied with the thought of me that he spoke of nothing else. I was the only subject of his conversations with all the prisoners whom he went to see; and he was simple-minded enough to think that it was they who constantly spoke of me to him. He came back to me, quite delighted with the pretended esteem in which all held me. ‘It is astonishing,’ he used to say to me, ‘how they all admire you, and how much everybody here is interested in you; they speak of you constantly, and I can go nowhere without hearing your praises.’ This became true later on, when they had noticed the extreme pleasure which it gave him. Being dependent on people produces

flattery; captives make use of it towards their gaolers as courtiers do towards their sovereigns. Once the weak point of De Maisonrouge had been discovered, people under him bethought themselves of winning his goodwill through pandering to his weakness. Some began to send me refreshments, others amusing books; all of them, according to their power, paid me some sort of homage which always passed through him."

It was thus also that the Chevalier de Ménéil came into Mademoiselle Delaunay's life.

"He took advantage," she says in her Memoirs, "of a dream which he had had, or pretended to have had, in order to pay his court to his master. He said to him one day that the night before he had dreamed that his sentence had been passed—it was indeed a prisoner's dream—and that he had been condemned to the Bastille for life, in company with me, however, who was never to leave prison either—and that this circumstance had made up to him for the severity of the judgment. This seemed to Maisonrouge to be flattering for me, coming from one who had never seen me, and the prospect of keeping me under his supervision for ever did not displease him either. He came to me at once to regale me with this tale, and I don't know why I paid more attention to it than I usually did to similar things which he was accustomed to say to me."

By the law of premonitions this acquaintance which had hardly begun was destined to be of some significance, and indeed it grew quickly into an intimacy. Simple, good-natured De Maisonrouge helped it as much as lay in his power, unaware as yet that he was helping to prepare for the breaking of his own kind heart in the very near future.

“He went,” as the Memoirs say, “to see De Ménil, and the latter having mentioned verses in the course of conversation. ‘You ought to write some,’ he said to him, ‘just to amuse your neighbour.’ His room was opposite mine. ‘That is all very well,’ said De Ménil, ‘but how? I have neither paper nor pen.’ ‘If that is the only difficulty,’ rejoined the lieutenant, ‘here is a pencil and some paper, you have but to write.’ He wrote some verses composed very hastily on a scrap of paper which Maisonrouge brought me, delighted to have procured this new diversion for me. ‘To make it still better,’ he said to me, ‘answer in the same vein, I shall give you what you want to write with.’ This beginning of an adventure pleased me immensely. I was very grateful to the King’s lieutenant for his kindness. Upon my answer came another the next day, to which I was again asked to reply. Maisonrouge, seeing nothing in this joke which could be of any concern to the King or the State, and perceiving that I took great pleasure in it, encouraged us to go on, and

we were delighted to do so. Our poetry, though it was mere doggerel, did not always flow very easily; I insinuated that prose, being easier to write, would be more agreeable. The lieutenant gave his consent to that also, in the kindness of his heart, and every day he brought an open letter and carried back my answer."

If De Maisonrouge had at that time been capable of logical thinking, he would have remembered that he who gives his little finger will soon have to give his whole arm; and so it happened to him without delay. De Ménil began to feel that correspondence was insufficient and that conversation would be more satisfactory, and though Mademoiselle, Delaunay, from more or less romantic reasons, was opposed to it, an interview was arranged.

"Ménil was very curious to see me," we read in the Memoirs. "He spoke of it from time to time in his letters. I persisted in my opinion that the charm of our adventure lay in our never having seen each other, that in losing this advantage, it would become commonplace, far less piquant, and that our relations would become strained. In spite of these wise representations, his request for an interview became more and more pressing. At last De Maisonrouge showed us to each other by placing us each on our own doorstep. We both felt rather abashed, perhaps from the fact that we felt we must now come

down in our expectations. We said nothing to each other—such was the agreement made—and, after a few minutes, we both disappeared. The letters which followed this ‘apparition’ betrayed the harm it had done to our prestige. I noticed it. It provided me with some new subjects for pleasantries; we had exhausted all that could be made out of our first relations!

“Prisoners, however, are not people to get easily discouraged. The Chevalier, thinking that a conversation would be more resourceful than this mere glimpse of one another, represented to the lieutenant that the favour he had granted was too small, that this could not be called seeing each other, that getting acquainted meant to talk to one another; at last he wrung from him that supreme favour. The lieutenant brought him to my room one evening. I had gone to bed, and in order not to hinder our conversation, he left him standing at my pillow and went to the further end of the room to talk to Mademoiselle Rondel. Renewed embarrassment took hold of us. The Chevalier, like Tonquin d’Armorique, who, after he had found his love, did not know what in the world to say to her, found nothing to say to me. We had no more reason to be satisfied with each other, on further acquaintance, than we had been when we had first met. Maisonrouge, noticing that our conversation dragged, came forward to help it on. It went a little better with him; but was altogether so short that we hardly had time to realise each other.”

The romance was in danger of flagging; Mademoiselle Delaunay revived its fire by means of a little feminine ruse. Whitsuntide was approaching, and she pretended that whilst preparing for it, she must give up all worldly diversions and, amongst them, her correspondence. This plan did not meet with as much objection as she had hoped.

“I was extremely piqued,” she owns, “by the small resistance offered to my decision, and this feeling, out of all proportion to its cause, made me fear the existence of an even more serious sentiment. This apprehension, added to my pique, helped me to keep to my decision. The faithful Maisonrouge still remained to me, more assiduous, more attached and less favoured than ever.”

Indeed, after Whitsuntide was over, he even tried to make up for past renunciations by proposing that the Chevalier and Mademoiselle Delaunay should breakfast together.

“We took tea together,” she says, “with a certain air of unconcern. Soon after that De Ménil discovered a way of unlocking his own door, so that interviews could take place even without De Maisonrouge’s intervention, and while he was having supper with the Governor of the Bastille, innocent of any suspicion, conversations could be carried on in peace until the clanking of the sentinel’s picket upon the pavement of the courtyard warned the prisoners that the lieutenant was returning.”

That which was bound to happen sooner or later, happened one evening when Mademoiselle Delaunay imprudently insisted on keeping De Ménil a little later than usual; the turnkeys, whose suspicions had been roused, came round earlier than was their custom, locked the doors, and took the keys to the lieutenant.

“I could not describe,” exclaims Mademoiselle Delaunay, “the utter dismay I felt when I heard the keys turn in the lock. What decision was I to take under such fatal circumstances? The only thing which I saw clearly was that the Chevalier de Ménil must not remain locked up in my room. To be found with me during the day time would only have been the breach of a rule, of a local custom, but to spend the night in my room would have meant a scandal in any country. And how was I to get him out? The doors were barricaded in such a way that nothing could be attempted there. The windows were not more accessible. There remained to me no other resource than the mercy of poor Maison-rouge who would be grievously offended by this. At last I armed myself with all the courage that was necessary on an occasion so pressing, and I waited at my window for his return from the Governor’s rooms, where he was supping.

“As soon as he entered the courtyard, I called to him and asked him to come in to say good-night. He ran to his rooms to fetch down my keys and

came to me, beside himself with joy at this unaccustomed favour. I went up to him—his rival, who was standing in the background, was yet hidden from his view. I said to him in a most embarrassed manner: ‘You taught your neighbour the way to my apartments; he has very indiscreetly taken it without your help. Meanwhile they have locked us in, you would not, I am sure, leave him here with me, rid me of him, I beseech you!’ At the first word I uttered, he caught sight of the Chevalier de Ménil, and his expression changed. The air of gaiety which he had had on coming in, gave place to the utmost gloom, and he said to us very curtly that this put him into a very awkward position, that he could not fetch Monsieur de Ménil’s keys, come down again, and open his room without attracting the notice of his servants, and giving rise to suspicions which would be as detrimental to me as they would be to him. I owned that he had reason to complain of our imprudence. I confessed that I was in the wrong, and promised not to transgress again; I implored his friendship as my only resource. He left me without further comment, went to fetch the keys, came back to take away De Ménil who was more disconcerted than any of us, locked him into his room, and did not return to mine.”

This unpleasant adventure ought to have cured the two of their temerity, but it was to be foreseen that it would not. They were caught again, and this time with more serious

consequences. The Memoirs relate this as follows :—

“One day, when we thought ourselves more secure than ever because the lieutenant had gone to dine at Vincennes with the Marquis du Châtelet, his friend and former colonel, Monsieur Leblanc came to the Bastille to say to the Governor that he needed some explanation in reference to a declaration imputed to the Chevalier de Ménil, and that he must see him about it at once. The Governor, who was at dinner, left the table, and ran with such speed to fetch De Ménil that the latter, who was with me when we became aware that the Governor was going to his room, had not time to get there before him. The Governor did not find him there, but Ménil joined him quickly enough to face the whole outburst of his anger of which the echoes only reached me. After his access of fury was over, he gave the Minister's message, and carried the answer to him without saying anything of what had just happened, and for which his lack of vigilance would have been made responsible. But as soon as Monsieur Leblanc had gone, he ordered the Chevalier de Ménil to be transferred to one of the towers and lodged in a kind of cell which was very far away from my apartment. The severity of this treatment, and the unpleasant construction which could be put on so hurried a removal, overwhelmed me with dismay. Contrary to my custom I gave myself up to tears and to despair. Never had a feeling as desperate as this filled my heart ; I felt as if my very soul had been torn out of me.”

This last sentence marks very fairly the degree of intensity to which Mademoiselle Delaunay's passion had risen during the few months which had elapsed. She had begun by carefully guarding against emotional surprises ; she had even, after De Ménil's first protestations of love, written a very wise and very well-balanced letter, in which she had said that to listen to these would be to disavow the principles on which her whole life had been built up, and that she did not wish to add to the misfortunes which Fate had put upon her—those into which her own imprudence might drive her, and which would be all the more felt because she would be entirely responsible for them. This letter had not meant more than do most of its kind in similar circumstances ; prudence had written, but passion acted with total disregard of this, and when it seemed needful, Mademoiselle Delaunay proved her inconsistency by rousing jealousy in her swain, with a feeling of quite natural elation. There was not only faithful De Maisonrouge to be used as an instrument on those occasions, but also the famous Duc de Richelieu, whose windows were exactly opposite hers, and who loved to while away his time with a little aerial conversation. His lightheartedness was proverbial, as was the procession of carriages which could be seen advancing towards the Bastille on the days when the Duc was known to take

his walks on the ramparts. The carriages filled the whole length of the street from the Porte Saint Antoine to the moats of the prison ; and it was a rather piquant spectacle to see women, who bitterly hated each other for their rivalry in the Duc's affections, meet that day, in a common effort to catch a distant glimpse of the careless cavalier. Some women were there who had been the Regent's mistresses, and whom he had impudently stolen from his sovereign ; Mademoiselle de Valois, the Regent's own daughter, and Mademoiselle de Charolais were there. It was even whispered that they had disguised themselves as women of the common people to go and see Richelieu at the Bastille.

Between times, this irresistible conqueror had to content himself with what the Bastille itself could offer, and he had discovered, without difficulty, that Mademoiselle Delaunay was amusing. One day, among others, he helped in his careless way to rouse useful jealousy in the Chevalier de Ménil's heart.

“ One evening Maisonrouge had brought me the contents of his hunter's bag,” says Mademoiselle Delaunay, “ and he was supping with me when Ménil, who had discovered how to unlock his door, came and listened at mine. He pretended afterwards that I had been very gay, and that I had spoken of him with a lightheartedness which was

offensive. But what displeased him still more was, that on leaving the table, and as it was extremely hot, we sat down at the window. The lieutenant asked me to sing. I began a scene from the opera, *Iphigenia*. The Duc de Richelieu, who was at his window also, sang the responses of Orestes in this scene, which was exactly suited to our circumstances; Maisonrouge, who thought that it would amuse me, let us finish the whole scene. It did not amuse the Chevalier de Ménil at all. The next day, in his letters, he asked questions about the conversation at supper; I did not know that he had listened to it. I had forgotten that we had mentioned him at all, and I said nothing about this to him. He construed it as the making of a mystery, about which he was so outrageously angry that he wanted me to break off all intercourse with De Maisonrouge."

This request was hardly necessary, for poor De Maisonrouge was becoming of less and less account. Rondel, Mademoiselle Delaunay's maid, was first employed to carry some of the letters between the two correspondents, some turnkeys were won over by De Ménil to perform the same offices, and in their case there was no point of delicacy which demanded the letters to be sent open; finally, as the months went on, Madame de Pompadour's intercessions with the Regent obtained full liberty of intercourse between all the conspirators which were still at the Bastille. This was the final blow for poor De Maisonrouge; but the day



ARMAND DU PLESSIS,
DUC DE RICHELIEU.

on which the new liberties were first enjoyed left an indelible impression on Mademoiselle Delaunay. She describes it in her Memoirs, with all details.

“When I was least expecting it,” she says, “I saw De Ménil enter my room, without any precautions. I was surprised and afraid; he reassured me by announcing to me the happy news. I was overwhelmed with joy in spite of the sadness I felt at my sister’s death, the circumstances of which had filled my heart with great bitterness. It must be owned, to the shame of natural feeling, that nature’s voice is hardly heard when passion speaks at the same time.

“Messieurs de Pompadour et de Boisdavis came in a little later to congratulate me on the increase of conviviality. The King’s lieutenant had gone to dine at Vincennes on that day; on his return he came to me, ignorant still of what had been granted to the Chevalier de Ménil. When he saw him in my room, in such good company, and with every appearance of having a right to be there, he remained thunderstruck, speechless and motionless. I was touched by his grief, and, going up to him, I told him that Madame de Pompadour had obtained permission for us all to see each other. He had known that she was petitioning for this, but he had not believed that it would come so soon. He said to us, in rather forced tones, that it was but meet and right and that he congratulated us upon this, but he could not utter one other word, and remained glued to the seat he

had taken, like one petrified. The gaiety of the assembly put the last touch to his confusion, and not being able to stand so painful a situation, he left us."

There was a final explanation between the two a little later, so high-minded and generous on the part of De Maisonrouge that his heroism deserves to be quoted.

"My dear friend," he said, "you are happy now. I had wished for it, but your happiness costs dear to my heart. Live in peace with one who is dear to you, but do not ask me to witness it. As long as I could be of any help to you I overcame my repugnance by inconceivable efforts; I should do it still if it could be of any use to you; but you no longer have need of me. Allow me henceforth to come to you only when propriety or some service which I may still be able to render you will demand it of me. . . . I sacrifice myself unreservedly to your happiness; may the man who is to give it to you be as faithful and as devoted to you as I am."

Happiness is generous of small gifts.

"I insisted," says Mademoiselle Delaunay, "on his continuing to see me, and I won my point. I promised him to keep out of his sight anything that might wound him; and I was careful that he should not meet the Chevalier de Ménil when he came to my room, which was very rare."

She was not always equally tolerant of society.

“I was much annoyed,” she owns, “by the easy access to my room granted to the people whom I looked upon with indifference. They did not look upon me in the same way, and this increased my annoyance. If, as a good author has said, even a gardener is a man in the eyes of nuns, a woman, whatever she may be, is a goddess in the eyes of prisoners. Ours did certainly dedicate a kind of worship to me; but their vows and their incense often nearly suffocated me. . . . They all assembled in my room so continually that I was often beside myself and so bad tempered that Ménil reprimanded me severely, without any consideration for the cause of my annoyance, which deserved much indulgence on his part.”

These disadvantages were a small price to pay, for the happiness which filled her.

“I wished,” she says, “for no other liberty than that which I enjoyed; it seemed to me that no other world existed outside my prison walls. It is the only happy time I ever spent in my life. I could not have believed that happiness would attend me there, and that everywhere else I should seek for it in vain! Every one awaited with avidity the news which should announce our speedy liberation. I pretended, in order to save my dignity, to desire it like the others, although at the bottom of my heart I was far from wishing it.”

Had she known the disillusionments which

would attend her days of liberty, she would have wished still more fervently for indefinite imprisonment. De Ménil, in whom she believed so implicitly, whom she had made the centre of her universe, was even then planning for himself a successful future in which she was to have no part.

CHAPTER XV

RELEASE OF THE SCEAUX CONSPIRATORS

As time went on the little company of Sceaux conspirators dwindled away ; more and more frequently the prison gates opened and let out those who had confessed. The first to go were Mademoiselle de Montauban, young Monsieur de Malezieu, and Barjeton, one of the lawyers who had been employed by the Duchesse du Maine. His colleague Davisard had to wait considerably longer, and to him waiting was a torture. This man of whom it was said that it was easier for him to be in several places at the same time than to be in the same place for any length of time, at last fretted himself into a serious illness. It brought him his release ; the Regent had no wish to let any one cheat him by dying in prison, and he sent an order to set the prisoner free. " Isn't this a hoax ? " said Davisard, from the depths of his bed, when he saw the *lettre de cachet*. " No," said the Governor, " it is genuine." " My stockings, my breeches, quick, quick," said the prisoner, hurling himself out of bed. His dressing, his departure, his cure, all was effected in one brief moment !

Monsieur de Malezieu was, of all the conspirators, in the most critical position; it was impossible for him to deny his partnership in the fatal letter, the pasted pieces of which proclaimed his guilt beyond refutation, and yet he maintained a dogged silence which drove his judges to the last limits of exasperation. At last a rumour began to spread that he was to be removed to the Conciergerie and executed after a very summary trial.

Madame du Maine was much affected by the news, and she herself was not bearing with much philosophy what she termed the "horrors of her lonely captivity." She had a maid-of-honour, a lady-in-waiting, a chaplain, a doctor, and five waiting-women; but, as Mademoiselle Delaunay remarks, "princes feel lonely unless they are in a crowd." As to "horrors," she had found Dijon damp, and she had been allowed to move to Châlons. Châlons seeming to her damp also, and of objectionable architecture, the Regent had given her a choice between two country-houses in the neighbourhood. But in spite of this Madame du Maine declared every day that she was a victim of the most cruel, unfair, and rigorous measures. Madame, the Regent's mother, says that "she played cards and beat her *entourage* alternately" all day long; but it is hardly probable that her versatile mind could have been satisfied with such a limited range of occupations.

What is quite certain is that she made the most of a pathetic situation. She played cards "sadly" with her attendants, and interrupted herself now and again to exclaim with dramatic melancholy: "Let the Regent judge of my pains by my pleasures!" She was as fond as ever of classical quotations, and when she declared more or less opportunely, "*Aux fureurs de Junon, Jupiter m'abandonne,*" the tender-hearted La Billarderie, unused to classical lore, would fall a prey to profound and puzzled despair.

As the months passed the Duchesse grew weary of her rôle of "*Orlando Furioso*," to quote Madame again, and she yearned to obtain her liberty at any price. Monsieur de Malezieu's unflinching spirit was now the only obstacle in her path; it piqued her pride and she felt that she could not stoop to a confession, before he had yielded. The Regent, on his side, was more than wishful to bring to an end a business which had entailed endless trouble, yet he also desired to see his honour safe and his dealings justified by a full confession of the culprits. At this juncture, Madame la Princesse, who, in the beginning of her daughter's troubles, had been forced to exercise more energy and initiative than she had ever shown before, decided to ascertain the calibre of Monsieur de Malezieu's resisting power. It was a difficult task, the

most contradictory rumours being circulated on that subject; but at last it was declared to Madame du Maine, on the best authority, that the citadel had fallen. The faithful La Billarderie brought this good news, and the truth of it was attested by Madame la Princesse and many others who were anxious to bring about a favourable *dénoûment*.

The Duchesse was wise enough not to enquire too much into the strict truth of this statement; she sat down without demurring, and wrote a most detailed confession of her doings "in order," as we are told, "to prove her sincerity." Before there had been time to read the document to the Council of the Regency, the courier, who had carried it to the Regent, brought back the *lettre de cachet* which set Madame du Maine free. She received it with transports of joy; only one unexpected clause in it—the stipulation that she should reside at Sceaux—caused her some disappointment.

Monsieur le Duc du Maine was released about the same time as the Duchesse, in January 1720. From the day of his arrest he had kept up consistently his attitude of a frightened hare, startled at each unexplained noise, shrinking from all unfamiliar sights. Each time his prison door opened, he expected to see the executioner with his fatal axe. He steadfastly repudiated

any connection with his wife's imprudent dealings, and the testimonies of all those concerned tallied entirely with his declarations. "Monsieur le Duc du Maine was not advised of this," "Monsieur le Duc du Maine was carefully kept in ignorance of the measures taken," are sentences which constantly recur in the evidence given. The Duchesse's emphatic declarations on that subject provoked a general smile, when they were read aloud before the Council of the Regency.

The Duc d'Orléans was quite safe in giving back their liberty to his formidable opponents; at the beginning of the year 1720 there were very few people who took them seriously.

The conspiracy of Sceaux, or rather the leisure for reflection which it afforded to the conspirators during their incarceration, had one unexpected consequence. While simulating the broken reed in his prison of Dourlens, the Duc du Maine was in reality steeling himself to the most momentous decision of his life. One of Madame's remarks gives us a clue to the situation. "The Duc du Maine," she declares, "has written to his sister: 'It is not into prison, but into a strait waistcoat that they ought to have put me, for having thus allowed myself to be led by the nose.'" The Duc du Maine was meditating upon the advisability of a legal separation from his turbulent wife! He feared the extravagance of her expenses

as much as the waywardness of her caprices, and at last he resolved to repair to Clagny, one of his country seats, and from this safe and distant shelter to open negotiations with Sceaux.

Public rumour was apprised of this earlier than Madame du Maine, but no one dared break to her the news of such an astounding defection. She was journeying by slow stages from her Burgundy residence towards Sceaux, in her own carriages, which had been sent to meet her by order of the Regent; and at each posting station she had expected to find her husband in readiness, eager to take upon himself the familiar yoke. But disappointment followed upon disappointment, and the members of her escort were groaning under the necessity of finding evasive answers to her pressing questions, when, to their relief, an imprudent postmaster at Fontainebleau revealed the truth.

Madame du Maine, says Mademoiselle Delaunay, "was seized with astonishment and indignation at this news, and wanted to have an immediate explanation. Bad luck being very persistent in the choice of its victims, this delicate business fell to the lot of poor, faithful La Billarderie, who floundered even more than usual, and patiently bowed his head under the storm which his explanations raised."

Another painful surprise awaited Madame du

Maine at Sceaux; she found her old residence a desolate solitude, none of her friends were there to greet her, not even one member of her family, although she had been given the formal assurance that she would find her children there on her arrival. She was informed that the right to allow access to Sceaux rested with Madame la Princesse, her mother. The crafty Regent had in this way prolonged the chastisement, while seeming to retain no responsibility in the matter, and he had every reason to think that his deputy had been far too terror-stricken by recent events not to be over-strict in the exercise of her duties. Under this new *régime* at Sceaux Madame du Maine must have felt at times as if she had gone back to the old tyranny of her childish days, only—and therein lay the ignominy of the situation—she was now forty-five, and her mentor bore the features of her meek, affrighted little mother.

The Duc du Maine's fine resistance lasted just six months. As long as he remained firm in his refusal to see his wife, the danger of a surrender on his part was comparatively small; his position was impregnable; he had plenty of grounds for his decision, and the conditions he proposed were most fair. Foremost among them was an offer to pay his wife, out of his considerable fortune, a yearly pension, in return for the privilege

of being allowed to live in peace. The Duchesse, however, would have none of these negotiations. She hurried impatiently through the endless letters he sent, and never wavered in her conviction that she could easily pull down this laborious edifice of resistance, if only she could gain access to the rebel.

An interview was effected at last, and its easily foreseen result was that the Duc du Maine put away his artillery of war, his pens, and his papers, and returned obediently to his old haunts and his useful occupations. His favourite, isolated turret saw him again at work on his accounts, which were in sad need of his care. He was submissive as ever; in one thing only did he remain obdurate. Monsieur de Malezieu, though pardoned by the Regent, should not return to Sceaux, nor were any of those who had even the most distant likeness to conspirators to cross its threshold.

It was a sad year which the Duchesse du Maine spent from January to December 1720. Her days were empty, her life was disorganised, her mind unoccupied; her reputation for being a *bel-esprit* was in great danger; there was nothing left to her to stimulate her wits, except an unending correspondence with her "Oracle," whom the Duc du Maine had installed at a safe distance in one of his country houses. The Cardinal de Polignac, in his exile at the abbey of Anchin,

preserved an injured and prudent silence, nursing many grudges; his manuscript of the *Anti-Lucrèce*, seized with other papers at Madame du Maine's, had not been returned to him for a long time, and he had not forgotten yet the anxieties he had suffered on that account. So great was the caution which he had sworn to observe thenceforth, that he shrank with physical repugnance, even from a copy of Madame du Maine's "Declaration to the Regent" sent by her for his perusal. He would have nothing to do with seditious writings, and it was only after his secretary had vouched for the harmlessness of the said document, that he could get reconciled to the idea of having received it at all. His prudence never forsook him—he even avoided social functions at which he was likely to meet his former "Circe," and once only, on the eve of his departure for Rome, a safely distant residence, did he appear at Sceaux again to make warm protestations of friendship. From that day he was lost for good to Madame du Maine, who never heard from him again.

Six months elapsed before Mademoiselle Delaunay was allowed to leave her prison and to return to Sceaux. The Regent had been heard to exclaim that she should be made to speak like all the others, but after sixteen months in the Bastille she was as elusive as ever in her answers,

as ready with her teasing methods. A few days before her release, the Governor sent her the intimation that Monsieur Leblanc was waiting for her declaration.

“I answered,” she reports, “that I did not know what he meant by a ‘declaration,’ that I had only met with such things in novels, and that, presumably, it was not the kind of thing Monsieur Leblanc expected from me! I added, however, that I would write to him to ascertain what he required!”

Madame du Maine sent her an imperative command to write all she knew of the affair. “And so I wrote,” she says, “but without priding myself on being sincere, and I wrote only what I knew they least cared to read.”

CHAPTER XVI

EVENTFUL YEARS, 1720-1730

WHILE Madame du Maine was disdainfully drawing round her again the magic circle which separated her from the rest of a negligeeable world, France had gone through an incredible series of dramatic events; the apotheosis of Dubois, created Cardinal, a gorgeous and scandalous ceremony at which the whole Court had been present, with the exception of Saint-Simon, who boasted of being the only titled man honoured by an exclusion—the death of the Cardinal Minister two years later, amidst general abhorrence. “J’espère que ce temps-ci fera partir mon drôle,” the Regent had said on the morning of the very hot day on which he died. Other events had roused to the utmost the emotions of France; the total collapse of Law’s system and Law’s bank in the Rue Quincampoix, and the ruin of thousands of people. Law himself, who had become a Catholic and a Frenchman, whose sons had danced the Royal Minuet with the boy princes of the blood, had reaped the fruits

of his labours at last. He had been attacked by an infuriated mob, had seen his carriage wrecked and shattered, and had barely escaped with his life. "What! has Law himself not been torn to pieces?" was the cold-blooded comment of a magistrate, when the news of the outrage had been announced in Parliament.

The young King had been at death's door, had been saved against all expectations, and had been betrothed against his will to the Infanta of Spain, a baby girl of three. The dignity of the eleven-year-old boy had no doubt been vaguely offended by the choice of so very juvenile a bride; at any rate the tears had welled up in his eyes when the proposal had been made to him, and he had given his formal consent before the Privy Council in a very low and constrained voice. The little Infanta had arrived and been received with great pomp. She was fast forgetting Spain and the memories of her babyhood. Madame de Ventadour, the young King's former governess, had been assigned to her as chief lady-in-waiting, and on her lap the little Princess could be seen following the hunt with all the gravity of a serious Spanish baby. The young King had been crowned and anointed at Rheims, and at the end of the same year 1723, the Regent had died quite suddenly of apoplexy. Though the Regency proper had ceased at the coming of age of the

King, a few months before, he had still nominally ruled France as its Prime Minister. To whom should the direction of affairs be given henceforth? The natural successor was the Regent's son, but he was barely twenty, and totally unversed in public affairs. The choice of the Council fell therefore on the next in dignity—Monsieur le Duc, head of the house of Condé.

The fact that Madame du Maine's nephew had been appointed Prime Minister did not establish any closer link between Versailles and Sceaux. For years Monsieur le Duc had been on the side of the enemy in the great litigation between the legitimate and the legitimised princes; he had been the Duchesse's "gaoler," or so she had considered him during her imprisonment at Pignerol, and she detested him cordially. It was nothing to her that he had redeemed the fortunes of the Condés, beautified Chantilly beyond measure, paid off those creditors who in her childhood days had so crowded the passages of the castle that at times circulation had been difficult; nor was it of any account to her that all this had been done, thanks to the gigantic fortune which the Duc had made in the infamous Rue Quincampoix.

If Sceaux ignored Versailles, Versailles on the other hand found no interest in Sceaux. There was nothing there which could have attracted the young King; he neither appreciated its *com-*

merce de beaux-esprits, nor its luxuriant gardens, its arbours of Persian lilac and Bengal roses, its exotic hot-house flowers, which Madame du Maine loved with an hereditary love. He was only happy at Rambouillet, the residence of the Comte de Toulouse, and the best hunting ground in the kingdom.

The queen of Sceaux might have been jealous of this renewed preference shown to her brother-in-law, the same who had basked in the sun of the Regent's favours whilst the house of Maine was plunged into utter abasement; she had, however, in theory at least, abjured all rivalry. It is true her many legal researches had not had the results she had hoped for, but they had brought her knowledge of a very pleasant nature—the inferiority to herself of most of those dukes and peers who had tried to trample under their feet the dignity of the house of Maine. She had discovered, and had taken care to make known to the world, that the proud De Luynes were descended from an insignificant little lawyer, the Richelieus from a lute-player, the De la Rochefoucaulds from a butcher, the De Noailles from a servant of the Comte de Beaufort. She loved to dwell on these discoveries in moments of dejection, and they were a balm to many small wounds.

One of these was, perhaps, the growing popularity

of the Princesse de Conti. The Contis were a younger branch of the Condé family, their beautiful seat at l'Isle d'Adam was famous for the Venetian *fêtes* given on its illuminated canals on which flower-bedecked boats glided to the strains of Lulli and Rameau. Madame du Maine could easily have borne a rivalry in outward display, but the point which rankled in her heart was that the Princesse de Conti's *salon* counted more and more as one of the centres of intellectual life. It was the most advanced in court circles, and in its spirit a precursor of those *salons* in which later on the Encyclopædists were to attack and to deny with ruthless independence of mind. Its precincts—and that was perhaps a slight consolation to Madame du Maine—were generally shunned by the young King; they were practically forbidden ground to him, for Cardinal de Fleury looked upon l'Isle d'Adam as a hotbed of impiety, and Louis XV. was still entirely under the influence of his old tutor.

Cardinal de Fleury's ascendancy in political matters was daily gaining in strength, and Monsieur le Duc was to be deprived of his office before long. His chief aim had been to raise the financial status of France at all costs, and his political enemies had prompted the young King with the declaration that he was weary of the tyranny of financiers and had decided

to govern for himself. The last important measure taken by Monsieur le Duc was to be a very decisive one, however—the annulling of Louis XV.'s betrothal to the Infanta of Spain. It was imperative that the King should marry immediately and have issue, so that the question of the succession should be definitely assured; for intrigues were still rife, and France had proofs of the fact that Philip V. still watched with feverish interest every fluctuation in the King's health.

And so, one day, in the year 1725, Marie Leczinska, living her simple unambitious life in Lorraine, heard the wonderful news that she was chosen to be Queen of France, and on another day, not very long after, the little seven-year-old Infanta stood in the private apartments at Versailles, surrounded by those who had been attached to her small person, and in the dignified manner which was hers by inheritance, she thanked them gravely for their care and for the interest they had taken in her education. Then, in her heavy coach drawn by six mules, she set out on her way to Spain, escorted by her Cameriera and by the Spanish ambassador.

This event gravely compromised the relations between France and Spain, and although the urgency of the measure had been fully represented to the Spanish Court, the two countries, which were so closely allied, stood on the very brink

of a war. To weather the threatening storm, there was need of all Cardinal de Fleury's genius as a peace-maker, and his successful averting of complications did a great deal towards strengthening the position which he was to hold for so long. For years he was to be chief ruler of France, although the power had been nominally transferred to the hands of the young King, who had come of age three years before his marriage.

CHAPTER XVII

VANITAS, VANITATUM

It had been the prudent wish of Madame la Princesse that Mademoiselle Delaunay should not re-enter her daughter's service, but Madame du Maine waved aside the suggestion; there was still a great scarcity of intelligent listeners at Sceaux, and Mademoiselle Delaunay had decidedly proved her value, she was not a person to be given up. For the first time the Duchesse deigned now to express to her waiting-woman a gratitude which had been well earned. An appreciative letter reached Mademoiselle Delaunay by secret ways, and was read by her with great emotion.

"I feel more affection and esteem for you than ever," said the last lines, "and all you have done has not surprised me; I trusted your intelligence and your fidelity. As soon as I have the pleasure of seeing you, you will receive proofs of my friendship, which you deserve. Good-bye, my dear Delaunay."

In June 1720 the last and the most obdurate of the Sceaux conspirators left the Bastille; but

to her liberty, so long delayed, had no enchantments ; her feelings were as contradictory as those of the unselfish and devoted Maisonrouge, who did not know whether to grieve or to rejoice. The love of the Chevalier du Ménil had not stood the test of the "open air" as she said herself—he had left the Bastille some time before her, and the last few months had done much towards proving his faithlessness. The world seemed grey and empty to the woman who felt that even her self-respect had been wrecked in this last lamentable love affair. All through her description of her return to Sceaux there runs a note of weary disillusionment.

"I received with my liberty," she says, "the order to start at once for Sceaux, where Madame la Duchesse du Maine was staying. I sent to the Temple to ask the Abbé de Chaulieu for his carriage to take me to his house and then to Sceaux. He was already very ill, and his illness was to end fatally three weeks later. I saw him and realised how indifferent one is to everything when one reaches that extremity. He had been deeply concerned by my captivity, and now he did not seem to be even touched by my release. I felt keenly the impending loss of a friend who had ever made it his task to put joy into my life, at least as much joy as was compatible with my mode of living ; but I was not able to stay with the Abbé as long as I should have liked ; I had to start on my journey without tarrying.

"I arrived at Sceaux towards evening, Madame

la Duchesse du Maine was out driving, and I went down through the gardens to meet her. She saw me, ordered her coachman to stop, and said: 'Ah! here is Mademoiselle Delaunay. I am very glad to see you again.' I went up to her, she kissed me, and drove on. I went back to the house and was taken to the room which she had chosen for me. I was delighted to find that it had a window and a fire-place—and to hear that there were two new waiting-women, one to replace the head one who had died, and the other to occupy the place which had been mine. . . . There was hardly any one at Sceaux when I went back. The Duchesse d'Estrées only had come as soon as she had obtained permission.

"Madame la Duchesse du Maine was not yet allowed to see many people. She used to play 'biribi' nearly all night and to sleep during the greater part of the day. I was asked to sit up and read aloud, just as I had done before. I was very much out of practice, and this tedious occupation soon made me regret the peace of my prison days. Madame la Duchesse talked to me about her captivity, and told me all that had happened. She talked a great deal, and asked very few questions. . . ."

Vanitas, vanitatum! alas for the glamour which once lent enchantment to a princess's protestations of attachment, to her wearying confidences during the long wakeful hours of the night! "She kissed me and drove on . . . she talked a great

deal and asked very few questions! . . .” With what uncompromising sharpness these few clear-cut lines, shorn of flourishes of fancy, draw the silhouette of irresponsible selfishness.

By degrees life at Sceaux regained its equilibrium; Monsieur de Malezieu came back from Châtenay, Mademoiselle du Maine came back from her convent at Chaillot—friends returned, old and new. There were some defections: the Cardinal de Polignac would never again explain his *Anti-Lucrèce* to a fluttering audience of admiring women; De Laval and De Pompadour, touched to the quick by the contempt for their literary gifts, expressed in Madame du Maine’s “Declaration,” turned their backs upon Sceaux and preserved a haughty silence. But for these social losses there were some compensations. Sceaux had made obeisance to Versailles, the candour of its Virgilian atmosphere was not marred by the faintest breath of politics; the Regent and even the most cautious of Versailles’ courtiers confirmed that by their frequent presence.

The echoes of the peaceful valley of the Bièvre again resounded with odes and eglogues in praise of its familiar genii, and Madame du Maine trod its soft lawns and winding paths as Venus, Hebe, or Astarte, just as circumstances required. Monsieur du Maine, restored to his charges and with the hope of being some day restored to his

dignities, enjoyed with serenity the new shadow of authority which had come to him under the new *régime*.

No shadow seemed to darken this bright scene, except that thrown by a figure which stood neither outside nor inside the enchanted circle, but hovered ever between the two in all the discomfort of a false position. "The distinctions which had been granted to me, since I had given up the functions and the title of a waiting-woman, had no defined limits," complains this victim, "and I did not know whether I was inside or outside. Whenever I crossed the boundary, either unconsciously or by order of Madame la Duchesse du Maine, the expressions and the murmurs of her ladies-in-waiting, careful of the distance which should be observed between us, made me realise it most unpleasantly."

Mademoiselle Delaunay's scepticism increased perceptibly at that time, and it is not to be wondered at. Du Ménil has shamefully confessed his indifference and has married a cousin heavily endowed with flesh and with money, but very sparsely provided with intelligence. The two lovers had been wont to laugh over her letters together in the old days of the Bastille. The deserted woman has wept her last tears of disappointed love, bitter and strenuous tears, of which she is ashamed, and which have made her



MADAME DU CHÂTELET.

1881-1882

realise all of a sudden that she is old, and that to her the world is old and colourless. The famous Marquise du Deffand, the sceptic *par excellence* at least in manner and in principle, wins her admiring sympathy at the very first visit she pays to Sceaux.

“No one possesses more wit,” Mademoiselle Delaunay exclaims, “and of so natural a kind; this sparkling fire which fills her puts life into everything and penetrates it down to its innermost recesses; it gives relief to the faintest lines. She possesses in a supreme degree the talent of depicting a character, and her portraits, which are more living than their originals, give a better knowledge than one could gain from the closest relations with the originals.”

It was under the influence of Madame du Deffand that Mademoiselle Delaunay made that inventory of her qualities and features which resulted in the uncomplimentary portrait of herself already quoted. It is a pessimistic production from beginning to end; having shown little leniency towards herself, she feels authorised to show none at all to others, she declares deliberately; and disillusionment rings all through the last lines of her portrait:

“She has always been sensitive to friendship, but has set more store by the merit and the virtue of her friends than by their feeling for her;

she has been indulgent to them, if they have only failed her, provided they did not fall short of what they owed to themselves. . . . ”

The chapter of sentiment and romance is closed for Mademoiselle Delaunay and another has opened: that of sober considerations.

As the adaptability of her temperament decreased the complications of her position increased, and led her to a serious consideration of possible means of escape; two refuges seemed within reach — a convent or a *mariage de convenance*. A few legacies from old friends made her an eligible candidate for either status, and it might have been comparatively easy to find an honest commoner, willing to share with her his name and the solidity of his bourgeois home, in exchange for promotion or the credit which might accrue to him from the protection of the court of Sceaux. The wife's share in this transaction was, so far, slightly problematic, as it depended on the good-will of her patrons, and Madame du Maine saw treachery in any plan which would partly deprive her of very valuable services. As to Monsieur du Maine, in all matters not political, he had not shaken off his chains and could not be relied upon to act independently. Mademoiselle Delaunay felt after due consideration, that under the circumstances it would be easier to enter a convent than to steer safely into the

harbour of matrimony, and, foreseeing Madame du Maine's opposition, she decided not to consult her. She went secretly to a Carmelite convent and asked to be admitted as a novice. The nuns did not receive her with that ardour for proselytism which is commonly attributed to them; they enquired into the sincerity of this sudden vocation, and when the postulant retorted by begging them to take her in at once, lest her fervour should suddenly evaporate, the Mother Superior pushed her back gently into the carriage which had brought her. Thus ended Mademoiselle Delaunay's only attempt at conventual life.

The other harbour still remained open, and in spite of sober reason and sobering experiences, she still had a lurking hope that her heart might have some share in the satisfaction with which she would glide into its shallow waters. The absolute devotion of the ex-cavalry captain, Monsieur de Maisonrouge, was strong enough to throw, even now, some glamour of sentiment over a union which was still his one aim; but now, as before, the Chevalier du Ménil stood between him and Mademoiselle Delaunay, and ere the latter had succeeded in shaking herself free of her folly, death intervened, and poor faithful De Maisonrouge had to go where human desires are unfulfilled.

Once again, later on, sentiment softened with

its glow the harsh outlines of a prospective business arrangement, and this was the result of Madame de la Ferté's efforts. The Duchesse, reconciled to her *protégée* since the latter had justified her prognostications, was convinced that she could be as successful with Mademoiselle Delaunay's second "establishment" as she had been with the first! Her choice fell on a disconsolate widower, whose wife had been a very intellectual woman. The description of her "strategy," as given to her matrimonial candidate, shows her as breezy and self-confident as ever:

"I found at the Maréchal de Villeroi's that poor Dacier," she writes. "It is pitiful to see him. He told us that he was as full of grief as on the first day, and ready to die of despair. 'Eh bien,' I said to him, 'there is only one way of finding comfort, you must marry again.' 'Great God!' he exclaimed, 'what woman could replace the one I have lost? . . . ' 'Mademoiselle Delaunay,' I answered. For a few minutes he remained silent with astonishment, and after some reflexion he said: 'She is the only woman in the world with whom I could live, and who would not be an offence to the memory of Madame Dacier.'

"The Maréchal and I, seeing that he was affected, enlarged upon the theme, and we left him quite inclined to consider the question. I want him to marry you; he enjoys some celebrity and sufficient means. The place you will fill is that

of an illustrious woman ; this marriage will be as honourable as it will be useful."

Having sown her seed in two directions, Madame de la Ferté left the rest in the hands of Providence, according to her custom. She swore that she would bring this matter to a successful issue, but she went on a journey and forgot her scheme. Meanwhile the seeds were undergoing their natural process of germination. Monsieur Dacier's recovery was decidedly progressing ; the comfort held out to him as a possibility had come to appear to him a necessity, and he was ruminating over means to his end, when a move from the other side came to his help. Mademoiselle Delaunay, anxious to ascertain whether Madame de la Ferté's visions could be materialised, sent her old friend, Monsieur de Valincourt, as a skilful ambassador who could obtain a knowledge of the situation without showing too much of his credentials. The interview between him and Monsieur Dacier was most satisfactory, and mediation soon became quite unnecessary. Through some deplorable fatality, however, the more cordial Monsieur Dacier's advances became, the more determined grew Mademoiselle Delaunay's reservations, and it was only when the finality of death broke up the position that she "felt the irreparable error which she had committed in missing such a splendid opportunity to gain leisure and liberty."

As an epitaph on a last hope these words certainly lack sentiment, and her report on subsequent disappointments strike a still more practical business note. These passages of an eighteenth-century diary savour strangely of the style to be found in the advertisements of a modern matrimonial agency. "A man moderately rich, in a fairly good position, living a somewhat retired life in Paris, required a sensible wife to keep him company. As I did not know him," says Mademoiselle Delaunay, "I doubted whether I could put up with his society. The affair having to be concluded with preliminary examination, I refused."

Another affair was not despatched with quite so much celerity; a trusted friend had proposed it. This time the candidate was "a member of the landed gentry, about fifty years of age, recently retired from active service and living on a handsome income in the provinces, in a well-built and comfortably-furnished house." It seems that a "preliminary examination" was allowed in this case, for Mademoiselle Delaunay went to see the prospective suitor at the house of the friend who was seeking to bring about the marriage. He was, we hear, moderately handsome and of stately presence—the impression made on him by Mademoiselle Delaunay was not unfavourable. "He did not find me as decrepit as he had

expected," she says, "and, moreover, he was satisfied with the small property I possessed. . . . He said to his friend that he was prepared to conclude the business, provided I felt no repugnance for a life spent in a country home."

The prospective bride had, unluckily, a very great distaste for seclusion, and it was truly to be deplored that most of her suitors had chosen to live a retired life. She consulted with one of her friends, described the situation, and added the cheerful comment that this marriage seemed to her like "throwing herself from a window," but that, to tell the truth, she had been aiming at that for some time past. Only one answer was possible to this—the friend wrote that the "window" in question was at least a "tenth floor window," that it would be wiser not to select it quite so high up, and that to live shut in between four walls, with some one who would perhaps be incapable of pleasing, would be the surest way to turn into a reality what so far had only been a figure of speech.

CHAPTER XVIII

MADAME DU MAINE AS A MATRIMONIAL AGENT

MADAME DU MAINE was meanwhile also engaged in a matrimonial quest ; she realised that the only way to retain Mademoiselle Delaunay's services, and to keep her tolerably happy, was to marry her to some gentleman of the Ducal household, whose charge should entail residence at Sceaux, and whose position should give his wife the right to figure lawfully among the ladies-in-waiting at the Court. The Duchesse's statements were more concerned with the description of the "wife offered," and Mademoiselle Delaunay repeats with an enviable sense of humour what she has heard about it.

"Madame la Duchesse du Maine," she says, "has commissioned Madame de Sully, wife of a Swiss officer, to find in the Helvetian corps commanded by Monsieur le Duc du Maine, a man willing to accept a wife who has neither beauty nor youth, neither fortune nor family. The whole of the thirteen Swiss Cantons would hardly suffice for such a discovery ! Naturally the lady took a long time about it, and I had quite forgotten her commission when, having come to Sceaux one day

she said to me : ‘ I think that I have found the man for whom we are looking.’ She had accompanied her husband on a visit to one of his compatriots, and had come upon a veritable little idyll.”

A retired life once more ! but the clever mediator described it with convincing appreciation.

“ I found a little house very clean and quite new, surrounded by pastures with flocks of cows and sheep. The master of the house, who is not a young man, won my sympathy by his prepossessing appearance. He is of gentle birth, a widower, and lives in this retreat with two daughters. They seem to be sweet and sensible and entirely occupied with the duties of housekeeping. He has had very slow promotion, although he has been in the army for some time, and has always done his duty ; but he has kept himself in the background, and merit which does not brag of itself is rarely discovered. I think, however, that a protection which would advance his interests without demanding too many efforts on his part, would be very agreeable to him, and if Madame la Duchesse du Maine will allow me to put the matter before him, I have no doubt, from what I hear, that the proposition will be received favourably, and that it will be a most suitable establishment for you. He is a man of good family, who has lived very little in society and has not adopted its vices. He possesses, two miles out of Paris, a small property which he manages himself ; this, added to what the protection of Monsieur le Duc du Maine will do for him, will secure ample comfort for both of you.”

This well-modulated speech, gliding so pleasantly from the tones of wordliness to those of the pipes of Pan, fired Mademoiselle Delaunay's imagination. It suggested to her the picture of an idyllic life, in which each feature assumed a sweet and naïve charm. "I was then in the habit of taking milk," she says, "and for the time being nothing seemed as likely to afford satisfaction as to have cows at hand."

Some minor points had to be settled before the chief conditions of the agreement could be considered. The excellent daughters had to be pacified by the assurance that their prospective stepmother was not plotting to wrest from their hands the sceptre of housekeeping or the authority in the poultry-yard. Once this was safely accomplished, it was possible to pass on to more important things. Monsieur de Staal, the Swiss lieutenant in question, stated as his chief condition that he should be made captain of his regiment after the death of the present occupant of that post, who was in a very precarious state of health. He proposed that the marriage should be concluded as soon as he should have been given some security that this request would be granted. A demand so reasonable met with more opposition than might have been expected, and Madame du Maine's difficulties on this occasion cannot fail to enlist our sympathies for her impatience at her

husband's dilatory methods. Manœuvres and counter-manœuvres occupied a considerable time, and the two candidates had not met yet! But the Duc du Maine, being at last satisfactorily tied down to his promise, a meeting was arranged at Madame de Sully's house, followed soon after by a dinner at Monsieur de Staal's country place.

“The house, the repast, the company, everything suggested the simplicity of the golden age,” exclaims Mademoiselle Delaunay. “I found a small house, bright and clean, with white-washed walls; the absence of much furniture seemed rather an adornment, although later on I did not so much appreciate that style of house decoration. Fowls from the poultry-yard, meat from the flocks, and fruit from the orchard covered the table, as happened in the time when Jupiter, the hospitable, was revered. Our young hostesses had prepared most of the dishes themselves, and regaled us with cakes and cheese made and served by their own hands. I looked on with pleasure at this way of living, which is in accordance with Nature, and has become so foreign to our tastes, and I believed that it would suit me. I felt well satisfied with the master of the house, with his bearing, and a certain unstudied courtesy which comes from the heart and denotes a kindly and benevolent nature. . . . I found, in fact, that such was his character. . . . We had, after dinner a conversation in which we discussed the affair in question. Monsieur de Staal expressed his great

wish to see it concluded, but remained firm nevertheless in his intention not to come to a final agreement until he should have been assured of his promotion. I approved this wise precaution, and we separated satisfied with one another. When I had got into my carriage, he deposited at my feet a small lamb, the fattest of the flock, which he begged me to accept. This pastoral gallantry seemed to me in perfect keeping with all the rest."

An introduction of so entirely satisfactory a character ought to have hastened the conclusion, but Monsieur du Maine, on whom it depended, never hurried. Meanwhile time slipped, the tender colours of the idyll were fading one by one in Mademoiselle Delaunay's memory, and when Madame du Maine sent for her unexpectedly one day to tell her that Monsieur de Staal had received his nomination, and that all was settled, she was filled with dismay. That which had seemed pleasant at a distance changed its aspect as it drew near. "I was astonished," she says, "at my past blindness, and yet felt the impossibility of drawing back, after the steps which had been taken. I fell into a kind of stupor." A severe illness gave her for a time some hope of escape, but she was restored to health in spite of her wishes, and in vain did she entreat the Duchesse to intervene. Madame du Maine hardly

listened, and her indignant attitude later on towards any outside claims on Mademoiselle Delaunay's time shows that she never deigned to remember "either the representations made to her or the encouragement she had then given to the proposed division of duties."

The marriage contract was signed; the Duc du Maine granted the bride a pension for life; Madame du Maine provided a trousseau.

"The victim," say the Memoirs, "bound and garlanded, was sadly led to the altar by Madame de Chambonas, lady-in-waiting to Madame la Duchesse du Maine, and then taken back to Her Serene Highness; she received and embraced me with great transports of joy. I then went on to Monsieur le Duc du Maine to whom I quoted the words of the psalm: '*Suscitans a terra inopem, etc. . .*' I might add besides, I said: '*qui habitare facit sterilem in domo. . .*'"

After the ceremony was over, a small wedding party got into a coach to accompany the new bride to Gennevilliers, her husband's country house. Alas! the little white house worthy once of the inscription "*Parva domus, magna quies,*" and which before had been wreathed in smiles, was now all frowns.

"My step-daughters," says the bride, "had apparently flattered themselves that the affair would not be concluded; they were angry at my arrival and

disappeared instead of coming to meet me. They had not consented to be present at the ceremony, a fact which had already made me understand how ill-disposed they were towards me. After many exhortations the eldest was at last prevailed upon to show herself; she came with a rather bad grace, but I pretended not to notice this, and by many advances I tried to overcome her temper which mended a little at last. The youngest daughter appeared towards the end of the dinner with a few unconvincing excuses for not having come sooner, and finally everything assumed a decent, though not very enchanting, appearance. Monsieur de Staal was grieved at this disagreeable reception. I could feel nothing but surprise at being married at all, and there was in the air a feeling of discomfort which by degrees invaded the whole company."

The day after this pleasant initiation, the bride was found sobbing in her room by the very friend who had brought about the marriage, and after the departure of her guests she felt utterly forsaken and a stranger in a house which she should have considered her own. "Monsieur de Staal," she owns, "did all he could to make me happy, but my first impression could not easily be dispelled."

Her stay at Gennevilliers was necessarily a short one; after a few days she and her husband returned to Sceaux to take up their duties there. Some feeling of elation might have been expected from Madame de Staal on entering upon equal

terms at last the social sphere to which her education and her tastes entitled her, but her new advantages are by no means painted by her in glowing colours.

“Madame du Maine showed much pleasure in meeting me again under my new garb ; I enjoyed forthwith all the privileges of the ladies in her household—admission to her table, to her carriage. But I noticed on future occasions the repugnance she felt in being seen with me in the broad daylight of publicity. When the King held the review of the Swiss guards, Monsieur le Duc du Maine told her that she ought certainly to go to it, and to allow me to see this spectacle. She went and made me go with Madame de Surl . . . in another carriage . . . not in hers, in which she took Madame de Bess . . . better known at Court. From this I concluded that the sacrament of marriage does not wipe out *les taches originelles* like the sacrament of baptism.”

Other discoveries awaited her : Monsieur de Staal went to spend Lent at his country house, and sent his wife word that he was to start on a campaign directly after Easter. He therefore begged her to spend the Easter week with him at Gennevilliers.

“I put the proposal before Madame du Maine,” said Madame de Staal ; “she listened to it with astonishment and indignation, and not satisfied with an absolute refusal to grant my wishes, she

bitterly complained of my request, and accused me of the blackest ingratitude and of the most iniquitous procedures, just as if I had entirely failed in my duty to her in wishing to show some dutifulness to the husband whom she had given me. I tried in vain to recall to her the previous discussions which I had had with her on that very subject: everything had been forgotten and was flatly denied; I then saw that I had only fastened more securely the chains which I had tried to loosen."

CHAPTER XIX

THE LATER COURT OF SCEAUX

WITH the words just quoted the *Memoirs* end ; of the twenty years and more which were still before her, Madame de Staal Delaunay has recorded nothing, and there could be no stronger testimony to the truth of the feeling she expressed as she closed her diary for ever. With her own hands she had definitely fastened the chains, she had closed the gates which lead to the wide avenues of possibilities, and she saw before her the path of dead certainty marked out to its hopeless end. Of her dispirited walk down that dull path, what should she record, and why reiterate vain regrets ?

And so silence reigns more or less over this last part of her life ; of her correspondence during these years very little remains. The two men who had occupied a supreme place in her thoughts are dead : the Marquis de Silly will never again exact in his lordly fashion those epistolary communications so charming that they held his mind in bondage, though his heart was

unaffected; the Chevalier de Ménil, passing from her through the gates of treachery, is dead to her. The Abbé de Chaulieu, who had once counted as lost a day in which he had not found the means to please her, had at last reached the very limit of old age and life without ever being conscious of approaching it. No one remained who mattered vitally to Madame de Staal, except the *confidente* and kindred spirit of her later years—the Marquise du Deffand. Here and there only, in letters written to her, she throws off her load of silence and allows herself the luxury of small outbursts. “O ma reine!” she exclaims, “que les hommes et leurs femelles sont de plaisants animaux. Je ris de leurs manœuvres le jour que j’ai bien dormi: quand le sommeil me manque, je suis prête à les assommer,” and she adds philosophically, “this shows that I myself have not strayed very far from the species.”

The “species,” she understood them and judged them with merciless lucidity; a most striking example of it is the portrait of Madame du Maine which Madame du Deffand once found in a letter addressed to her by Madame de Staal within the last ten years of their correspondence. The tone of detached criticism, of coldly meted out justice, which runs all through the description of a woman at whose hands she

had suffered, and suffered very poignantly, makes it interesting enough to be quoted in full.

“Madame la Duchesse du Maine has arrived at the age of sixty without having been taught anything by her experiences; she is a child possessed of much wit, she has the unpleasing and the pleasing qualities of a child. Being inquisitive and credulous, she has wished to be acquainted with all the different branches of knowledge, but has been satisfied with superficialities. The decisions of those who have brought her up have become the principles and rules of her life, she has never doubted their excellence, she has submitted to them once for all. Her provision of ideas is made; she would reject the most clearly demonstrated truths and the best arguments, if they went against the first impressions which she has received. To examine into anything is impossible to her light-mindedness, and a state of doubt is unbearable to her frailty. Her catechism and Descartes’s philosophy are two systems in which she has equal faith.

“Her opinion of herself, however excessive, has only gone as far as it has been made to go. The idea she has of her value is a prejudice which has been given to her, like the rest of her opinions. She believes in herself as she believes in God and in Descartes, without examination, without discussion. Her mirror has not been able to cast any doubt on the charms of her physiognomy. The testimony of her eyes is more suspicious to

her than the judgment of those who have decided that she is both beautiful and well-made. Her vanity is of a singular kind, yet it seems less shocking because it is not reasoned out, although it is all the more absurd for it.

“To have intercourse with her is slavery; her tyranny is quite unconcealed; she does not deign to colour it with the semblance of friendship. She says ingenuously that she is unlucky enough not to be able to do without people for whom she does not care at all: and, indeed, she proves it. One sees her hear with perfect indifference the death of those who made her shed tears if they were a quarter of an hour late for a game or a walk.

“One cannot have any illusions about her: her frankness, or, to put it more accurately, the little consideration she has for anybody, causes her never to dissimulate any of her caprices. She suggested to a great wit of her times the saying that ‘princes are in a moral sphere what monsters are in physical life; in them one can perceive with perfect clearness most of those vices which are imperceptible in other men.’

“Her temper is impetuous and uneven, she passes from anger to despair, to indignation, to serenity, twenty times within a quarter of an hour. She often rouses herself from the very depths of sadness to break into a sudden gaiety which is most winning. Her wit is fine, quick and light; her memory is prodigious; she speaks with eloquence, but with too much vehemence and prolixity. One can have no conversation

with her ; she does not care to be understood, it is enough for her to be listened to ; consequently, she has no knowledge whatsoever of the mind, the talents, the defects, and the ridicules of those who surround her. Some one has said of her : ‘*qu’elle n’était point sortie de chez elle, et qu’elle n’avait pas même mis le nez à la fenêtre.*’

“She has spent her life in seeking pleasures and amusements of all kinds ; she spares neither care nor expense to make her court agreeable and brilliant. In one word, *Madame la Duchesse du Maine* is so constituted that one can say of her a great deal that is good and a great deal that is bad, without offending truth. She is haughty without being proud, is a spendthrift without being generous, she has religion but no piety, a great opinion of herself without contempt for others, much information without real knowledge, and all the show of friendship without the feeling of it. . . .”

What could be the life of those dependent on *Madame du Maine*, but a meaningless round of activities from which the healthy element of individual promptings, the tonic flavour of individual impulses must always and necessarily be absent ! All the weariness of it groans in the following passages :—

“We are for ever saying and doing the same things, we walk, we remark on the wind, on cards, on gains and losses, on the measures taken to keep the doors closed, whatever the heat may

be, and on the subsequent despair of those whom we call the stifled ones—among whom I figure.”

Under such circumstances even the discomforts of a transitory summer residence—such as Sorel¹ from which some letters are dated—may be greeted as a godsend, for they create at least a little stir in the torpid waters, they awaken desire for change, and is it not a pleasure to feel the stirring of a desire?

“Sorel is good, inasmuch as it makes you wish for Anet,” writes Madame de Staal, “and so I always come here with great pleasure. This is one of the pretty places in this world, nothing could be brighter or more cheerful than its general aspect, but nothing could be as morose and cheerless as its inhabitants. The châtelaine herself is reduced to wishing for some annoyance, some teasing element which might rouse the company. To-night we are going to have *un grand souper maigre* that won’t be more entertaining than the rest! In short, during this whole fortnight since we have been here, nothing has happened, either tragic or comic, that I could have written to you. I had thought of reporting to you Monsieur Dumont’s sore throat, as the most remarkable event of these days. He wanted to be bled. Her Serene Highness would not allow it. The tears of his wife, the emotion of the assembly, the request to call in Monsieur Bouteille, refused peremptorily, the manœuvres

¹ One of the summer residences of Madame du Maine.

to smuggle in Monsieur André instead, reduced to naught, the complaints on the one hand, the dissertations on the other, ‘tout cela s’est merveilleusement étendu dans le vide.’ Now Dumont has recovered, in spite of himself, without taking any remedy, and he feels quite humiliated by it. . . . Good-bye, my queen; if I had anything worth writing, I would sacrifice my dinner to you, but that which comes into my mind is more tasteless even than what I am going to eat. I lose all my thinking power when I have no time of my own.”

Though weariness moans in her heart, outwardly she bears herself bravely; graceful and witty, she gives of the bountiful stores of her mind, without expecting too much in return, and, as years go by, her name is found more and more frequently coupled with that of Madame du Deffand, whenever the attractions of Sceaux are discussed. These two women, so subtly alike in temperament, made, it is said, the glory of the second period of Sceaux, more than the Duchesse de Luynes, than the Marquise de Lambert in spite of the fame of her Paris *salon*, more than the Duchesse d’Estrées whose inexhaustible zest for activities was only equalled by that of Madame du Maine herself.

This princess, in spite of the prosaic claims of middle age and *embonpoint*, still looked upon herself as an impersonation of Venus and Astarte,

and claimed worship even from sceptics whose eyes failed to see this. Président Hénault himself, *ami attrité* of Madame du Deffand, her equal in terseness of speech and biting sarcasm, has to become lyrical like the rest—and how he bewails it later on!

“I spent more than twenty years at Sceaux, and may God forgive me,” he exclaims, “for all the tasteless compliments with which I inflated mediocre verses. If by some piece of ill-luck these wretched things were to survive me, they would lead people to believe that the Duchesse du Maine was beauty personified, that she was Venus floating upon the waters—one would mistake for physical charm that which was purely the charm of conversation. Madame la Duchesse du Maine,” he adds, “was the oracle of her small court. It would be impossible to be more witty, more eloquent, more playful, more truly courteous than she was, but, at the same time, one could not be more unfair, more self-seeking, or more tyrannical.”

All those around her had to humour her caprices, to bear with her tyrannies, to follow her breathlessly in a senseless round of activities which had lost their taste even for her, but which had become necessities of her life.

“. . . I am very sorry that you should be without diversions,” Madame de Staal writes to Madame du Deffand, “they are a medicine which is indis-

pensible to health—our Princess, at least, has no doubt of that, for although she is ill, she goes night and day without a pause. . . . These last few days we were steeped in diversions, now we are steeped in rain. . . . Moreover, our Princess has lately caught a feverish chill, in spite of which and in defiance of the diabolical weather our daily walks still continue. It would seem that Providence fashions for the use of princes special bodies made to resist the wear and tear of their caprices, otherwise they could never reach a man's estate."

One thing only, it seems, daunted the weather-proof energy of the Duchesse: a thunderstorm; it terrified her, it reduced her and her mental capacities to their very lowest depth.

"I read your letter to Her Serene Highness two days ago, my queen," reports Madame de Staal to her favourite correspondent. "She was in a state of great terror at the thunder, a circumstance which did not help your civilities to appear to their best advantage. Another time I shall take care not to expose you to a thunderstorm!"

Indoor diversions rivalled outdoor pursuits: the stage at Sceaux was seldom empty of actors, and Madame du Maine's zeal for learning the longest parts had not abated; but it happened sometimes, in that second period of her reign, that an overbearing rival dared to snatch from

her the sceptre of supremacy, Madame du Châtelet, for instance, who from time to time made tempestuous descents upon Sceaux with "her" Voltaire, her scientific books, her manuscripts, and her demands which set the whole household agog. Madame de Staal writes to Madame du Deffand, who had announced her arrival shortly after Madame du Châtelet's departure.

"At any rate the apartment reserved for you here is a comfortable one; it is that of which Madame du Châtelet had taken possession, after a discriminate inspection of the whole house! You will find in it, perhaps, a little less furniture than she had put in; for she had plundered all the apartments she had had before, in order to garnish this last one. Six or seven tables, which had been missing, were found there; she needs them in all sizes—very wide ones to spread out her papers, heavy ones to carry her travelling cases, light ones for her knick-knacks, ribbons, and jewels; and yet this fine systematic arrangement did not save her from an accident such as happened to Philip II. when, after he had spent the whole night in writing, some one upset a bottle of ink all over his despatches. The lady did not pride herself upon imitating the prince's moderation in this case—but then he had only written upon affairs of State, whereas, in her case, what had been smudged was algebra, a thing much harder to clear up! . . ."

The arrival of this female pedant is not described in enthusiastic terms.

“ANET,¹ 15th August 1747.

“ . . . Madame du Châtelet and Voltaire, who were to arrive to-day and who lately had been more or less lost sight of, appeared yesterday about midnight, like two ghosts, carrying with them an atmosphere as of embalmed mummies who have just risen from their tombs. We had just got up from supper, however they were famished ghosts and had to have something to eat; more than that, they had to have beds, which, of course, were not ready. The *concierge*, who had gone to bed, got up in great haste. Gaya,² who had offered to leave his apartment if it should be wanted, was obliged to give it up now; he moved out with as much precipitation and displeasure as an army overtaken in camp and obliged to leave part of its baggage in the hands of the enemy. Voltaire was very comfortable in Gaya's apartment, a circumstance which did not comfort Gaya in the very least. As to the lady she declared that her bed had been made very badly, and she had to be moved to-day. You will please note that she had made that bed herself!”

Madame du Châtelet's recriminations at all times were proverbial. Madame de Staal, who evidently felt nothing but antipathy for a mind all mathematics and a soul all vanity, writes a little

¹ One of the summer residences of Madame du Maine.

² An officer of Monsieur du Maine's suite.

later: "La du Châtelet has discovered a deviation of 16 degrees by 8 in her mattresses; this, I should think, has bruised her accurate mind more than her body which could hardly be called delicate."

On the 20th of August, five days after Madame du Châtelet's arrival, a new letter of Madame de Staal shows that the migrations of the troublesome guest are not ended yet.

"Madame du Châtelet has since yesterday completed her third installation; she could not any longer bear the one she had chosen before; it was noisy, it smoked without having any fire! (smoke without fire seems to me to be exactly her emblem). Noise, as she explained, does not incommode her at night, but in the day time when the fervour of her work is at its height, then it disturbs her thoughts. She is at present making a review of her 'Principles'—this is a practice which she repeats every year, for fear they should escape from her and run so far that not one of them could be got back again! I rather think that her mind is to her principles more of a prison than a natural home; there is then every reason to keep a careful watch over them."

A very biting piece of sarcasm—too biting perhaps, but it is quite evident from the testimonies of contemporaries that Madame du Châtelet never enlisted many sympathies. Madame du Maine's circle shared the common opinion. "They have made themselves generally detested here," Madame de

Staal writes a few days after the departure of Voltaire and his Egeria, "by showing neither politeness nor consideration to any one." It seems that these two guests who were so careless in the matter of opportune arrival, so careful in the matter of their own comfort, made further breaches in the etiquette of hospitality by remaining all day long secluded in their apartments.

"Our ghosts do not show themselves in the daytime," we hear from Madame de Staal, "last night they appeared at 10 o'clock, I don't think that we shall see them much earlier to-day; the one is busy describing valorous deeds, the other is writing comments on Newton—ce sont bien des non-valeurs dans une société où leurs doctes écrits ne sont d'aucun rapport."

To the very end Madame du Châtelet seems to have kept to her systematic selfishness, though Voltaire, who evidently felt the criticism in the air, made some effort at propitiation.

"She prefers," we hear, "the charm of her own occupations to any amusements and she persists in not showing herself till nightfall; Voltaire, however, has composed some flattering verses which have dispelled just a little the bad impression made by their unusual behaviour."

The only occasion on which they redeemed their reputation was on the eve of their departure.

One of Voltaire's comedies, *Le Comte de Boursoufle*, was acted, and Madame du Châtelet, though neither her physique nor her costume were suited to her part, acted with such consummate excellence that she won the complete appreciation, even of Madame de Staal. "She acted with such perfection the extravagance of her part that it afforded me the very greatest pleasure." A few notes of criticism, however, are scattered amongst the praises of this performance, to which many guests had been bidden, and also a well-known actress, Madame Dufour, who was to have the pleasure of acting the secondary part of housekeeper to Madame du Châtelet, in her chief part of Mademoiselle de la Cochonnière.

"It is Venture¹ who is acting the Comte de Boursoufle—his will not be a speaking likeness, nor will this be the case with Madame du Châtelet acting Mademoiselle de la Cochonnière, who ought to be short and fat. . . ."

And a little later the correspondence records:—

"All went off fairly well, and one can say that this farce was well acted; the author ennobled it by a prologue in which he acted himself, and very well, too, with our Dufour, who but for that glorious rôle could not have digested being Madame Barbe; she could not consent to the simplicity of dress

¹ A rather sorry-looking secretary of Monsieur du Maine.

required by her rôle, neither could the principal actress who, putting the interests of vanity above those of the play, appeared on the stage in all the elegance and brilliancy of a court lady; she and Voltaire fell out over this point, but she is the sovereign and he is the slave. . . .”

Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet, by their real literary excellence, and, perhaps, who knows to what degree, by the decided independence of their attitude, had set a current of real enjoyment flowing through the dormant waters of Anet; and from the lips of Madame de Staal, who was ever ready to be conquered by excellence of any kind, there falls a spontaneous confession of dependence upon these two: “I am very sorry that they are going,” she owns, adding however, “but I am wearied out with her numerous and diverse caprices, all of which she expects me to fulfil.” The post which arrived the day after the departure of these exacting guests can only have strengthened Madame de Staal in her reservations. She describes this to Madame du Deffand with her usual verve:—

“The day after their departure, I received a letter of four pages and added to that, in the same packet, a note which announces a great *désarroi*, Monsieur de Voltaire has mislaid his comedy, forgotten to take with him the actors’ parts written out separately, and lost the prologue. I am enjoined to find everything, to send on the prologue at the

very earliest opportunity, not by post, because *some one would be sure to copy it*. I am to keep the separate parts for fear of the same danger and to lock up the comedy under a hundred locks and keys! I should have considered a latch quite sufficient for the safe keeping of such a treasure! I have, however, duly executed all the orders I have received."

Not until Madame du Châtelet brought him in her train had Voltaire appeared at Sceaux, and yet, as a young man, when he relied upon his wit alone to conquer a place in society, he had seemed especially fitted to figure among the intellectual purveyors of Madame du Maine. About 1732 again, Madame du Deffand had tried to attach him in some capacity to the household of the Duchesse, and although the post she offered was not the most desirable, she had pressed him very much to accept it. He had refused; his independent spirit was full grown at that time and chafed at the restraint which was awaiting him; his answer, with its little venomous dart at the end, is very characteristic:—

"You have proposed to me, Madame," he wrote, "the dignity of equerry in Madame la Duchesse du Maine's household, and as I did not feel equal to that task, I have been obliged to wait for another opportunity to pay my court to you. I hear that besides that post of equerry there is

also another one vacant, for a reader; but I am quite convinced that this is not a sinecure with Madame du Maine, *as it is with the King.*"

Voltaire knew the exactions of the service at the court of Sceaux, and he who at Madame de Châtelet's house was granted, as a matter of course, the undisturbed enjoyment of his own private apartments, his own gold plate, his own moods, and his own tempers had naturally been unwilling to bend his neck under the yoke and to file into place in the well-disciplined ranks of the Sceaux courtiers. Disciplined they were indeed, and from a hard necessity, meek of spirit, for Madame du Maine ignored other claims than her own. She expected the best of all things to fall quite naturally to the best of all beings—herself; that division of gifts seemed to her the only possible one.

CHAPTER XX

THE CLOSE OF AN EVENTFUL LIFE

IF there is one human need which was bound to starve most cruelly in the atmosphere of Sceaux, it is the need of friendship. Madame de Staal longed for friendship; the very frequency of the letters written by her to Madame du Deffand shows how much she yearned for it. All the rather cold and sometimes cynical philosophy which disillusioning circumstances had built up in her, crumbles down when true devotion is roused. The same absolute unselfishness which had once marked her relations with the Marquis de Silly again characterises her intercourse with Madame du Deffand. Where she loves whole-heartedly, she sacrifices herself as whole-heartedly. In her solitude of mind and heart, her friend's letters are the only real joy of her days; yet she constantly puts a curb upon her desire for them.

For some reason still unknown, the letters of the year 1747 are the only ones which have been

preserved; at that time the friendship between the two women is of long date already, but there has been no blunting of the keen sensibilities. The letters of Madame de Staal follow close upon each other, often at a distance of two or three days only, and when the answers do not arrive quickly, impatience calls out insistently. Yet she chides herself for this, and she begs Madame du Deffand to take no notice of her demands. "I beg you," she writes, "to have no regard for my complaints, and to give way to laziness by all means, when it overtakes you; I love your letters passionately, but writing them shall not cost you anything," and later on: "Are you going to Champs, *ma reine*? Perhaps you are there already. I know nothing about you, but provided you are well, I approve of everything." And another time: "I will not buy my pleasure at the expense of your trouble, not even the pleasure of hearing from you. . . ."

More precious still than her letters were the visits which Madame du Deffand paid from time to time to the Duchesse du Maine. These seem to have been scarce in that year 1747, and from the cautionary measures advised in the letters stands out quite clearly the fact which was to be expected—that intercourse between the independent minded Marquise du Deffand and the tyrannical Duchesse du Maine was not a

smoothly working function. Though Madame de Staal longs for the tonic presence of her friend, her one wish is to spare her annoyance, even if it must mean the giving up of a visit long planned. There is in the letters a good deal of discussion about the comparative merits of *le grand château* and *le petit château*; these were the two residences of Madame du Maine at Sceaux. In the main building, the *grand château*, resided the Duchesse herself, and there she assigned apartments to those of her guests whom she wished to honour specially. Madame de Staal, as one of the chief ladies-in-waiting, had her rooms there too, and would naturally have preferred to have Madame du Deffand under the same roof. An apartment in the *grand château* would, as a matter of course, have fallen to the lot of the influential Marquise, but—there were conditions attached to this honour which she was at times utterly incapable of fulfilling. . . . There was something in the atmosphere of Sceaux which would suddenly plunge her into uncontrollable fits of boredom; on those occasions she would unexpectedly be called back to Paris on matters of the extremest urgency. Now levity in the treatment of the *grand château* was the unpardonable sin, and the essence of the crime, it will be noticed, was not wilfully to forego the society of Madame du Maine, but to leave empty one of those apart-

ments which must ever be filled, lest the tide of popularity should be thought to wane!

Madame du Deffand's presence is desired at Sceaux for the sake of her prestige, but her temperament evidently rouses hesitations.

"I suspect," Madame de Staal writes, "that the fear of having fewer guests by giving you more rooms is very detrimental to the affection 'a certain person' has for you, for 'our' dominant passion is the multitude; this taste increases and grows stronger as 'one' finds less resources in 'oneself.' . . . Whilst deeming you perhaps less amiable than of old, one does not any the less desire to have you here. The wish to be surrounded increases from day to day, and I foresee that if you keep an apartment without occupying it, it will provoke great regret for what will be missed in consequence, whatever it may be."

A little later, as Madame du Deffand has not yet given any certitude of her arrival at Sceaux, the wish to have her there increases in proportion. Madame de Staal has warmer messages to send, but knowing her friend's impulsive ways, she advises the choice of *le petit château*, for although it was damp and uncomfortable, to vacate an apartment there unexpectedly was counted a sin of lesser proportions.

"Madame la Duchesse du Maine sends you the assurances that she loves you as much as ever,

and will give you any apartment you may wish to have, as I have written to you already. To that I add, between ourselves, that if while at the *grand château* you only appear in the evenings, or if you go to Paris frequently, you will encounter great disfavour, even if it were only on account of the bad example you will set, by following your own wishes in these precincts. . . . Therefore, I advise you, *ma reine*, in spite of the convenience it would be to me, not to accept that apartment, unless you wish to accept with it more responsibilities than you take in the other. . . . If you cannot be here much, *ma reine*, try to be satisfied with the *petit château*, in order to avoid talk and perhaps complaints which would be unpleasant to you. Let us strive to let nothing separate us more than we are already! If you make up your mind to take up your abode in that cold and damp place, give orders that a good fire should be lighted in it, several days before your arrival."

Just before Madame du Deffand is to arrive at Sceaux, something happens which threatens to break off all relations between her and Madame du Maine. She has been to see the Duchesse de Modène, daughter of the Regent, a fascinating brilliant woman of whose rivalry Madame du Maine has always been passionately jealous. Such a defection is unpardonable! Madame de Staal warns her of the effect of this action and beseeches her to bridge over difficulties, if only for once, as she herself is strongly suspected of

admiration for the obnoxious rival, and unless Madame du Maine's anger is appeased, it will break up everything, irrespective of future regrets.

"Nothing, *ma reine*, could equal the surprise and the grief 'a certain person' feels at hearing that you have been to see Madame la Duchesse de Modène; the most passionate and jealous lover would bear suspicious dealings on the part of his loved one with more equanimity than 'one' endures these from you."

And then she quotes more or less textually Madame du Maine's oracular denunciations of the world for treating with such base ingratitude the noble and unique gift of her favours.

"You go and sacrifice yourself, you give up everything . . . and this is in reserve for you . . . one is indeed a rare example of ill-luck . . . those torments of which one thought to be delivered will again befall one . . . always the same pitfalls . . . it is a most cruel fate . . . etc., etc.! . . . I said all that could be said to calm her, but she would listen to nothing. Although I ought not to be capable of surprise any more, this scene has yet contrived to surprise me. Come, I beseech you, *ma reine*, come and prevent a catastrophe . . . I understand that you might be tempted to avoid such a thorny path, but remember that if you decide to do it, all will fall upon me whom you would leave utterly forsaken. 'A certain person' is already very ill-disposed towards me, and I entreat you, considering the circumstances, to lend yourself

to what is necessary in order to adjust matters. If, later on, you cannot stand it any longer (for I know how difficult it is) you will loosen the ties gently, without causing a definite rupture; I shall never ask of your friendship that your life should be made thorny and difficult; it is enough that mine should be so. If you shared my troubles, far from being relieved they would be doubled. We are leaving here to-morrow, and we shall arrive at Sceaux on Thursday; as I have told you I desire passionately to find you there on our arrival. I have never had so great a need of you, my queen."

Friendship, affection is for Madame de Staal the great softener of hard edges; under its influence she grows diffident about herself, she glows with a desire for perfection, she, to whom an exceptionally clear vision has given such self-assurance, a conviction that a very moderate state of grace is all one can expect of oneself and of others!

"It would be impossible to be more touched by your friendship than I am, *ma reine*," she writes, "but I am a little worried about the too good opinion you have of me; it makes me feel that I may be false, for if you do not see my faults, I must be hiding them, and that is worse than possessing them."

And going back to the same subject, another time:

"I see that it is not I whom you love, but

an ideal of your own creation, which you have made worthy of you, and which has all too little resemblance to the frail creature to whom you present it. You will, in the end, reduce me to my own value: I hope, however, that accustomed to love me and touched by my feeling for you, you will not love me any the less for your discovery."

Her sincerity prompts her to give instances of her unworthiness, and one of these is so touching in its pathetic grace, so illustrative at the same time of the atmosphere of Sceaux, that it is worth being quoted in full. Madame du Maine was suffering from an attack of rheumatism to which she sacrificed many of her attendants, but none of her diversions. Two nights running Madame de Staal had been called to keep the wakeful Duchesse company, and her weariness was so great that for a moment she so far forgot herself that she dared to show it. She bemoans the fact to Madame du Deffand.

"I am far from being as perfect as you think me. When I was fetched the second night, I made a wry face, being really hardly able to drag myself. The next day I was reprimanded for it, very curtly, and in the presence of many; that displeased me. I had begged Monsieur de Lassay, who was there at the time, to lodge for me a modest little complaint; he missed his opportunity, and I don't think he has found one since. Don't

mention this to him, if you see him, for now it would not be of use any more." Then she adds philosophically: "The result of all this has been that I have been left to myself a good deal, and perhaps that a little contempt, provided I do not deserve it, is better than a great deal of fatigue which I might have had. . . ."

Next to Madame de Staal's admirable capacity of devotion to real friends stands her no less admirable quality of indifference to all friendship not based on congeniality of mind and feeling. The importance in her eyes of those friends who can only be made by "climbing" and used for "climbing" she expresses in her own ironical manner. "As to those (friends) who can only be caught by aerial flights, one will do well to feel resigned when one misses them, and not to spoil one's features for their sake." All through the long years which she spent with Madame du Maine, she never used that rare perspicacity which was hers, that quick amusing wit on which the Duchesse had learned to depend, for any purpose of self-advancement; she never presumed on any appreciation shown to her qualities to make claims to any friendship. She had realised that Madame du Maine had none of the qualities which make a real friend, and she scorned a semblance of it. Yet, even while she thought herself resigned to the callous atmosphere around

her, something happened in that same year 1747, just as the first autumn leaves were falling from the trees in the beautiful park of Anet—something happened which made her realise with an ugly shock that she had yet been dreaming dreams about humanity, and that reality was more hopeless, by far, than she had thought. The Duchesse d'Estrées, closest friend of Madame du Maine, and the very embodiment of vitality, died suddenly, and Anet, shaken to its very foundations by this overpowering victory of Death, showed only one feeling after a few brief hours of stupor, a passionate wish to forget.

This event is the last she has recorded; a few passages in letters addressed to Madame du Deffand call up the melancholy episode. The first allusion to it is written in that slight note of mocking cynicism which Madame de Staal so frequently sounds; she does not foresee any serious consequences of the incident she relates, and her style follows its natural bent:

“Yesterday, the Duchesse d'Estrées had a heavy fall—being quite incapable of having a light one; she declares that her head in striking the stairs made a noise like thunder, and she says that she rolled down five steps. She had herself bled, and went down to supper; I suppose that she supped well, and that this accident will have no unpleasant consequences.”

The first consequence was an unexpected one. The Duchesse, deplorably headstrong as a rule, in a way which often caused her to fall from grace, went through a felicitous period of meekness and self-abasement which made Madame de Staal exclaim: "I have never seen her more easily satisfied or more accommodating, her rivals are getting thin with disappointment over this happy truce!"

There was no need to fear Madame d'Estrées' ever-renewed influence over Madame du Maine—it was doomed even then; a few days later she died suddenly, perhaps from the consequences of her accident.

"This afternoon we are burying that poor Duchesse d'Estrées," writes Madame de Staal, "and then the curtain will come down, and we will say no more about it. . . . We have not had any acting, it is true, since the awful spectacle which we have had to witness, but I should not wonder if we saw Monsieur de Senetterre's farce acted here again, before we leave. . . . It must be owned that this is going a little beyond human nature. I can imagine my own funeral, if regrets for me are greater, my funeral pomp will be greater in proportion . . . but what does it all matter!"

What does it all matter — this becomes more and more the keynote of Madame de Staal's philosophy. The vanity of things — how could it have been illustrated more poignantly than by

Madame du Maine's desperate wooing of pleasure—pleasure at any cost, at any price, as a mere assertion of her caprices, perhaps as a flimsy curtain screening but imperfectly the unfaceable terrors of old age and death. . . . For one who looked on with seeing eyes at the fantasmagory of Sceaux, there were many curious truths to be discovered; Madame du Deffand confesses that she, too, found in it rare good fortunes of observation. Madame de Staal and she had, from daily experiences, come very much to the same conclusions. One of those facts which had been most ruthless in the shaping of her life at Sceaux is expressed by Madame de Staal with a note of triumphant superiority although bitterness rankles in it still.

“From sheer spreading of their personality,” she writes, “the mighty ones of this earth become so transparent that one can see through them; it is a sight which affords fine opportunities for study, and I know of nothing which inclines me more to philosophy.”

She understands that as “the mighty ones” feel this irrepressible need of “spreading,” there can be but little room left for those dependent on them, and that the only wise course to take is to school oneself to indifference. “Sensitiveness,” she says, “increases as one panders to it; one is

often unhappy only from too great a wish to be happy."

Thus she expresses her renunciation which, for all its philosophy, still pulses with the eternal yearning of the human heart. How much was life to grant yet to her longings? Only three short years were left to her as she wrote the words last quoted, and of these last years nothing is known. The letters written after 1747 seem to have been lost, probably there were but few of them: the strenuous personality which had mocked at fate so long, which had hoped so buoyantly and had grieved so passionately, was dying out at last in the cold shadow which "the great ones of this earth" spread around them. Perhaps she found increasing peace and serenity; had she been asked to sum up these years of her life, she might perhaps have repeated those words which close one of her last letters and which seem to sound a defeat and yet a victory: "Since I have come to wish for nothing, I have felt more at peace than if I had everything that I ever wished to possess."

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